



THE BLACK BELT BLUEPRINT

AN INTELLIGENT APPROACH
TO BRAZILIAN JIU JITSU



NICOLAS GREGORIADES

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Jiu Jitsu Brotherhood Publications

The Black Belt Blueprint

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www.jiujitsubrotherhood.com

Dedication

For Marc Barton and Arash Moghaddas

**"A brother is a friend God gave you; a friend is a brother your heart chose for you."
- Proverb**

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Introduction

Jiu jitsu has been the single biggest influence in my life.

It helped me totally transform my body and my mind. It has taken me all over the world. Teaching it has fed me and put a roof over my head. It has allowed me to meet so many talented and interesting people and make hundreds of friends all over the planet.

I'm not sure which direction my life would have taken had I not found jiu jitsu, but it has undoubtedly made me the man I am today. I wrote this book because I want others to experience the same life-changing and far-reaching benefits of embracing the jiu jitsu lifestyle that I have.

Jiu jitsu is challenging. It's been estimated that for every 1000 people that try it only 5 or so continue and make it to the black belt. I want to change that. This guide is for those who want to start training but are hesitant for whatever reason. It's also for beginners who are finding the journey overwhelming. And it's also for the more advanced student's that are attempting to refine their game. It is my hope that this resource will make your experience with jiu jitsu as fun and productive as it can be.

Keep in mind that reading books and watching videos about jiu jitsu is not doing jiu jitsu. Just as you will never learn to swim if you don't get wet, neither will you become a jiu jitsuka if you don't get on the mats and train.

The hardest part of any undertaking is starting. It's committing to that initial action that will be the most daunting and most critical factor on your path to learning anything, jiu jitsu included.

It doesn't matter if you attend an introductory class at one of the huge academies in New York or London, or if you and a buddy get some mats and start training in your garage – as long as you take that first step.

One of the beautiful things about the art is that it is always in flux. Everyone has a different experience of it. What I offer you is the knowledge I have gained on my path. It has worked for me, and for many of my students, but it is not necessarily the 'best way' or the 'only way', but merely 'a way'.

I love hearing from readers and students all over the world, so feel free to email me (nic@jiujitsubrotherhood.com) with any thoughts, comments or questions you might have. I receive many messages per week so it may take me a while to respond to you, but I will endeavour to do my best.

See you on the mat!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicolas', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Nicolas Gregoriades
Chiang Mai, Thailand - December 2013

PART 1

Before You Start

"A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." - Lao Tzu

How To Use This Book

For those of you who have been training jiu jitsu for a while (blue belt or higher), feel free to skip to any section you want.

If you're a complete beginner however, I would strongly advise consuming the information in the sequence in which it's presented.

My System and Why it Works

“Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day - Teach him to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” - Anne Isabella Thackeray Ritchie

Keep an open mind

In jiu jitsu, as with any discipline, there are several different styles and approaches to the teaching of the art. I am not claiming that my method is the best, only that it has worked for me. During your own jiu jitsu journey I implore you to continue questioning. When you dogmatically commit to a belief or method without questioning it, your growth will inevitably come to a halt.

Become your own teacher

This system lays the foundation for you to become your own teacher. It will enable you to take control of your own learning path and not just be a sheep limited to following your instructor or YouTube videos.

We all have different body types and attributes. We also all learn differently. Some of us favour visual learning, whereas others might favour a kinesthetic learning style and need to physically do something before they internalise it. Either way, when it comes to learning jiu jitsu, ‘a one size fits all’ approaches are severely lacking.

My system works using a heavily concept-based approach and an emphasis on basic movements. This lays a versatile foundation which allows you to become your own teacher, and also to learn the movement patterns of more complex techniques quickly. This system is outlined further in the next chapter.

My hope is that, instead of being limited to instructors and YouTube videos, this book will give you the tools which free you to learn in whichever way suits you best.

Where to Train

You have several options when it comes to mat time, and all have their advantages and disadvantages.

Formal Classes at a Club or Academy

Sooner or later, if you want the full benefits of the jiu-jitsu lifestyle, you will need to join an academy.

When you find a potential academy, ask if you can watch class, or even better, if you can take a trial class. Use this time to make an assessment of the club.

Things to consider and notice include the following:

The Instructor(s)

The most important aspect of any academy is the instructor. It has been my experience that the best jiu-jitsu instructors are friendly, easy going and humble. They smile a lot and treat their students with honesty and respect.

Be wary of anybody who badmouths his competitors or claims to be the best for whatever reason. If someone has truly been practising jiu-jitsu for a long time they should be humble about their skills. If your instructor is a legitimate black belt, he will be clear and open about the lineage of his grade.

The Students

I have found that, more often than not, the students are a reflection of the instructor and visa versa. Happy, friendly students usually have happy, friendly instructors. Bullying, arrogant instructors have similar students.

Level of Professionalism

Although BJJ is a pretty laid back martial art, you should still expect high levels of professionalism from the academy you choose. Classes should start on time.

Hygiene

In a busy academy, the mats should be cleaned and disinfected often, preferably once per day. Don't be afraid to ask about this. Staph infection is not fun.

For a club in your area, see the 'Recommended Academies' section at the end of this book.

Private lessons

Private lessons can be expensive, but if you choose a good instructor they will greatly speed up your progress.

The way to get the most out of private lessons is to be specific about what you want to learn. Don't be afraid to ask the instructor. A good private instructor is, above all, patient.

If you have the time and energy, a good strategy is also to schedule your private lesson directly before or after a group class. In that way you can use what your instructor showed you in the class against your opponents, or ask questions about what you learned in the class while it is still fresh in your memory.

Keep in mind that you don't have to take private classes from a black belt. A good purple or brown belt with decent teaching skills can give you a great private lesson, and usually at a lower rate. Remember to ask for a discount for block bookings of 5 or more lessons.

Training with friends

A lot of the best training I've done was in these type of sessions. All you really need is a matted space and a buddy.

The quality of your training partners is especially important in this context. Obviously, having more experienced training partners is better for you, but this might not always be possible, and you might find yourself with people as novice as you are. As long as they are willing to learn and in control of themselves, just about anyone can make a good training partner.

Sparring with friends is good, but drilling is better. Take a technique or movement that you want to learn and practise it with the method I outline in the 'How to Memorize Techniques Efficiently' chapter of in this book.

Training videos, DVD's and technique sequences books are, in my opinion, almost useless to use by yourself. You should be on the mat going through the material with someone who is as eager to learn as yourself.

Note: Make sure you warm up properly before you begin, as this is often neglected in informal sessions and can lead to injury. Watch for BJJ specific warm-ups on www.jiujitsubrotherhood.com

Equipment

The Gi – a Jiu Jitsu Fighter's Armour

Most jiu-jitsu training is practised in a uniform called a 'Gi' or as the Brazilians call it, a 'Kimono'.

Buying your first gi can be a daunting process. There are many combinations of brands, cuts, weaves and colours to choose from.

- Size and Cut

Sizing is generally the same between most manufacturers, but the cut is not. Different brands have different levels of taper around the shoulders and back. This is largely a matter of personal preference and finding a Gi that suits your body type. Unfortunately it's difficult to test this out when shopping online, so you might want to try on one of the other students' gis at the academy.

Remember, that unless it has been pre-shrunk, your Gi will get a lot tighter after the first hot wash, so keep this in mind when choosing the size. The Gi should be a little baggy when you try it on, because it will drop and shrink a couple of inches in every direction after you wash it (in many cases even if it has been pre-shrunk).

- Thickness and Weave

The thickness of the cloth is referred to as the weave, there are several different weaves including honeycomb, single, gold, pearl and double. They differ in thickness, weight and strength, and each has advantages and drawbacks.

The heavier the weave and the thicker the lapels, the more difficult it will be for you opponent to grip you, and the longer the suit will last. However, the drawbacks are that if you are in a warm climate, the suit will become very hot and heavy as it becomes drenched with perspiration. It will also take longer to dry after washing.

There is an increasing trend towards 'super-light' or honeycomb woven Gis. These may look and feel cool to wear, but keep in mind what they were designed for - fighters entering competition who want to make weight. If you choose this as your standard training Kimono it's unlikely that it will last very long.

My personal preference is a the medium-weight gold weave Gi as it is a good compromise between the heavier and lighter weaves. I also favor the newer, higher-end models which include an in-built rash guard lining. This makes them far more comfortable.

Ideally, you will own several kimonos for training, travelling and competing.

- Color

Back when jiu-jitsu first began in Brazil, Gis only came in white. Over the years there has been a trend towards more and more flamboyant styles such as camouflage and other wild colour schemes.

On a professional and performance level, I would advise you against being the guy with the yellow or bright red Gi. It doesn't look cool. It should be your skills which draw attention, not your Gi. Stick to the classic three colours - white, blue and black. When you've been training for a few years and you've paid your dues, then maybe you can afford to be more flamboyant (i.e. dress like a clown.) Until then, try to fit in. Also, some federations will only allow you to compete in either blue, white or black Gis.

- Patches

It's cool to have a couple of patches denoting your school or a particular movement on your Kimono. It's not cool to look like a walking advertising quilt. Again, certain federations are quite strict about patch placement on Gis worn in competitions, so check before you sew it on.

- Brands

As with everything else, you get what you pay for when it comes to Gis. These are not the only good brands on the market, but up until this point are the best I have used.

- Origin

Origin is my favourite Gi manufacturer at the moment. I find that their kimonos have the best overall blend of quality, cut and attention to detail. I use their Pro Comp 2013 model as my main gi for teaching and competing.

- Shoyoroll

This is the Rolls-Royce of BJJ Gis. The quality and detail are exceptional. The pants even have padded sections to protect your knees. The first time I tried a Shoyoroll I was so impressed with it I contacted the company and asked them to sponsor me.

- Atama

A very reputable brand - one of the most durable kimonos available. Simple design with few patches and logos, which is perfect if you prefer a more 'minimalist' looking Gi.

- Tatami Fightwear

Tatami has a great range and all their models are decent, but I'm most impressed by their well-priced 'Nova' option, which is a perfect first gi for those with limited budgets.

- Lucky Gi

Lucky was the original 'designer' Gi, and is still one of the best quality and most stylish kimonos on the market.

- Keiko Sports

Keiko is one of the original Brazilian brands. It's a good, solid brand without being too flashy. They also have several different cuts and weaves.

Note: I would suggest that you do not try to use a judo suit for jiu jitsu. Jiu jitsu gis have tighter cuffs on the trousers and sleeves. This allows the practitioner to benefit from a closer fit, providing less material for an opponent to manipulate.

- Care of Your Gi

I wash my Gis after 1 or 2 training sessions. If I have finished training and I am not going to wash it, I will hang it up, preferably outside. The worst thing you can do is leave a damp Gi in your gym bag. The dark, unventilated space will turn it into a breeding ground for bacteria and it will smell like death. You want to tap your opponent out with your techniques, not with your stench. Also, wash your belt. Despite what some of the more superstitious guys tell you, it doesn't absorb your 'powers'.

So, whenever possible, try to hang your Gi outside in the fresh air and the sunshine. This will help keep it smelling and looking decent. I would also advise against using fabric softener when washing your gi because I feel this weakens the fabric and makes them tear more easily.

I would also recommend you check out my buddy Brendan's comprehensive Gi review site at www.gireviews.net.

Submission Grappling / No-Gi Training

- Rash Guard

T-shirts are acceptable for no-gi training, but rash-guards are far superior. They don't tear as easily, and they don't permanently stretch and get caught in your opponent's limbs. There are many, many good brands and you can find a cool one at www.jiujitsubrotherhood.com/shop. However, if you don't have the money, an inexpensive surf-style rash guard will suffice.

- Fight Shorts

'Sprawl', the original fight-short company, started a trend with designer fight shorts catering specifically to grapplers and there are now many options available on the market.

Fight shorts are better because they are designed to offer flex in the correct areas, but if you can't afford them I have found that most board- shorts function perfectly as fight shorts. Just make sure that you don't get ones with baggy pockets, which might cause

difficulties when training and which are also banned in competition.

Protective Equipment

All you really need to train is a Gi, but as a beginner, you might want to consider using these extras.

- Gum-shield

I don't train with a gum-shield anymore, although I probably should and I would recommend that if you're a beginner you should seriously consider wearing one. You have a number of options, but the best is always one that's been professionally moulded by dentist. Otherwise the inexpensive boil-and-bite ones will do fine.

- Cup / Jockstrap

Again, I don't use these anymore. I find that they just get in the way. I also found that they promoted poor technique when doing armbars and kneebars. They are illegal in competition too, so you probably shouldn't get in the habit of wearing them.

- Knee Pads

Although these are a bit of a nuisance to get on, and require frequent washing, they will save a lot of wear and tear on your knees. I haven't seen a jiu jitsu specific pair on the market, but in the meanwhile I use the Nike Volleyball ones.

- Ear-Guards

I used to wear these but ultimately found that they were more hassle than they were worth, and I decided I could live with cauliflower ears. If this is not an option for you and you are going to get some, I would recommend the Asics brand of wrestling ear-guards. Make sure you wash them frequently because they reek after a few heavy training sessions.

PART 2

The Framework

"Good order is the foundation of all things." - Edmund Burke

A Brief History of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu

In order to fully understand jiu jitsu, it is important to know where it came from.

Japanese jiu jitsu

The origins of the art can be traced to the Buddhist monks of India. Some would argue that its history is even older, and that it originated with the pankration events of ancient Greece. But for our purposes, jiu jitsu (sometimes referred to as ju-jitsu) in its modern form derives from the battlefield art of the Samurai of Japan.

These samurai warriors were well-armoured and usually on horseback and the art of jiu jitsu was essentially developed to allow them to fight effectively in the event that they found themselves disarmed and on foot.

Because of the restricted mobility and agility associated with fighting in armour, jiu jitsu evolved to include throwing, joint-locks and strangles in addition to striking moves found in other martial arts.

Judo

By the mid-1800's jiu jitsu had fractured into several styles or 'ryu'. Although the techniques varied from style to style, generally they all incorporated most aspects of hand to hand combat including strikes, grappling and weapon-based attacks and disarms.



Judo and Brazilian Jiu Jitsu share the same roots

The Gracie Family

A student of Kano's, Mitsuo Maeda (also known as Count Koma - 'Count of Combat') emigrated from Japan to Brazil in 1914. He was assisted by a local politician named Gastao Gracie, whose father had also been an immigrant, hailing originally from Scotland. As a token of his gratitude, Maeda taught jiu jitsu to Gastao's son Carlos Gracie. Carlos later shared his knowledge with some of his brothers, with whom he opened Brazil's first jiu jitsu academy in 1925.

Over the years, the Gracies (notably Carlos and Helio) and their students refined their art through brutal no-rules fights, both in public challenge matches and on the street. They focused their attention on submission ground fighting, which allowed a smaller man to defend against and ultimately defeat a larger attacker.

In the 1970's Rorion Gracie began to further refine the art, incorporating, among other things, moves from wrestling into the curriculum. Alongside this he devised the first point and rule systems for jiu jitsu specific competition.

The Ultimate Fighting Championship

In 1978, another Gracie, Rorion, moved from Brazil to Los Angeles, hoping to showcase his family's fighting system to America."

Although no-rules, mixed martial arts contests (known as "Vale Tudo") had been popular in Brazil since Carlos Gracie first opened his academy in 1925, they were largely unknown in the rest of the world. Rorion and Art Davie conceived of an event called 'The Ultimate Fighting Championship' (UFC), which would pit various martial arts styles against each other. The UFC enabled challengers from various martial disciplines to battle each other in an effort to prove the credibility of their sport and illustrate their martial art as the best.

The first UFC took place in 1993 and was completely dominated by Rorion's younger brother Royce. Royce was not a big man, and was outweighed by the other competitors. In spite of this, he exploited the other contestants' naivety of ground fighting and emerged victorious, defeating three opponents in a single night.

His wins led to a huge interest in Brazilian jiu jitsu, particularly in the USA and Japan, consolidating the sport's status as a truly global martial art.

The Modern Era

Today, Brazilian jiu jitsu is riding the wave of the 'Mixed Martial Arts' (MMA) explosion, and is the fastest growing martial art in the world. There are now thousands of jiu jitsu academies spread across every corner of the globe.

Sport jiu jitsu has also grown massively in popularity. There is an established governing body, the International Brazilian Jiu Jitsu Federation (IBJJF), which runs a yearly, global competition circuit that attracts thousands of entrants.

Staying true to its roots, jiu jitsu continues to be effectively utilized in MMA competition - all fighters, regardless of their speciality, require at least a working knowledge of jiu jitsu to stand any chance of success.

The art is constantly evolving and being refined by its practitioners. New moves and techniques are being invented every day - a testament to the dynamic and 'live' nature of the art.

How Jiu-Jitsu Works

Now that you have laid the groundwork for your learning process, let's explore the actual architecture which underpins the art of Brazilian jiu jitsu.

Positional Strategy

What differentiates Brazilian jiu jitsu from most martial arts is the employment of positional strategy. In jiu jitsu, the position you are in relative to your opponent is paramount. A kick-boxer or a karateka is concerned with knocking out their opponent, but besides distance and angles, they do not give much thought to the position of their body in relation to their opponent's.

Jiu-Jitsu first seeks to establish a position, and then to finish the fight.

Why Positional Strategy?

Simply, because it's more effective. Although you will probably be practising it in its sporting variation, Brazilian jiu jitsu was created as a system of self-defense for the street. It was designed to be the most effective and safest way of ending a confrontation against a bigger, stronger aggressor. Through testing in real-life scenarios, the Gracies discovered that a) most fights ended on the ground, and b) It was easier to control an opponent by first achieving a dominant position.

It's a numbers game, really. You have a far higher chance of finishing the fight successfully from a dominant position than you do of catching an opponent with a lucky punch or kick.

Positional Dominance

In a jiu jitsu match each fighter is constantly trying to achieve positional dominance. Being in a dominant position is desirable because it almost always means that gravity and/or leverage is on your side. You are also safer when you are in a dominant position because it will be difficult for your opponent to strike you or apply leverage against you.

Leverage

The scientific definition of leverage is beyond the scope of this text, but in a jiu jitsu context, we can look at it like this:

Attacking a weaker part of your opponent's body using a stronger part of yours.



White controls Black using the Back mount - the king of dominant positions

Or, a slightly more detailed explanation:

Using as much of your body weight and the large, powerful muscles of your hips, trunk and core to apply concentrated pressure against a weaker or more vulnerable part of your opponent.

A slightly different but equally important way to define leverage in a jiu jitsu context is:

Finding the most efficient way to multiply the physical forces you are able to generate, by using the correct body positioning and timing.

Transition

Transition refers to any period during a match in which neither grappler has an established position, or a movement from one position to another. Your goal should always be to ensure that any transition period ends with yourself in a dominant position. If you initiate a transition it should always end with you in a position superior to the one in which were previously.

If your transitions are good enough they themselves can become an intermediate form of control. Truly great grapplers switch so quickly and fluidly between superior positions that

their opponents become confused and ineffective.

Note: The stand-up part of sport jiu jitsu can also be seen as a transition phase.

The Basic Formula

Taking into consideration what we have just learned, jiu jitsu can be broke down into the following formula:

1. Take your opponent to the ground using a throw or takedown.
2. Transition to a dominant position as efficiently as possible.
3. Use leverage to finish the fight by applying a choke, strangle or joint-lock.

Another way of expressing the formula is:

TAKEDOWN → TRANSITION → POSITION → SUBMISSION

Obviously, there's a little more to it than that. Sometimes you end up in an inferior position, and then your goal is to escape to a safer position, and then move to a dominant position.

Also, some positions are more dominant than others. Your goal should be to either improve your position even more, or finish the fight with a submission.

Most beginners skip position and go straight for the submission. But the problem is that without the control afforded by the dominant position it will be extremely difficult to finish the opponent.

Trust me on this - if you want to progress as quickly as possible do not focus too much on finishing your opponent. Instead, look at the game from a positional strategy perspective and learn how to control your opponent comprehensively first.

The Positions

So now that we have an understanding of positional strategy from the previous chapter, we need to learn a little bit more about each of the positions themselves.

With every position we have to remember that there is both a defensive and an offensive aspect to it.

Keep in mind that this is a very broad overview. Entire books can and have been written on single positions. Each position has many nuances and quirks that you will become familiar with as you progress and the aim of this chapter is to provide a starting point for your further study and if you're a more advanced student, give you some vital and often overlooked details.

These are the most commonly encountered ground-fighting positions in jiu-jitsu, listed in hierarchy from strongest to least strong, (from the attacker's perspective).

Back Mount

This is the king of all positions in jiu-jitsu and the ultimate positional goal. You have your opponent in back mount when you are behind him with both of your legs 'hooked' around his waist. In jiu-jitsu we refer to these as the 'hooks'.



The Back mount offers great control and many attacking options

This is the king of all positions in jiu-jitsu and the ultimate positional goal. You have your opponent in back mount when you are behind him with both of your legs 'hooked' around his waist. In jiu-jitsu we refer to these as the 'hooks'.

Attacker's Objectives:

1. Submit the opponent

Defender's Objectives:

1. Escape to a safer position

Strengths:

- The opponent's neck is exposed, making him vulnerable to chokes and strangles.
- It is difficult and awkward for our opponent to do anything to us because we are behind him.
- We have major control over both the bottom and top halves of his body.

Weaknesses:

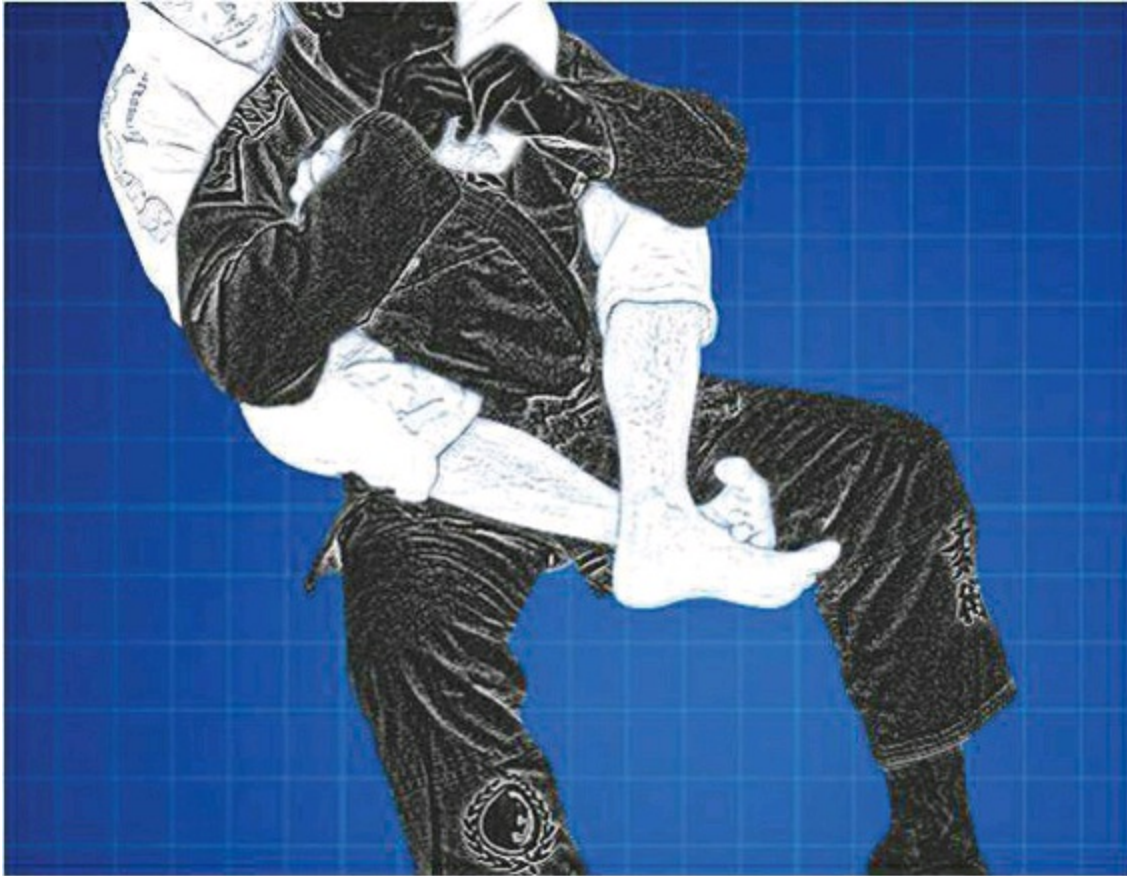
- None, but beware of crossing your feet as a skilled opponent will foot-lock you if you do so.

Offensive Tips:

- Keep control of your opponent's hips and shoulders and take your time when looking for the submission.

Defensive Tips:

- Your neck is obviously the main vulnerability in this position. Make sure it is protected by at least one of your hands at all times.



By crossing his feet while holding the mount white is in danger of being foot-locked



Black defends his neck correctly with his hands

Mount

This is a very strong position and is second only to the back mount. You have mounted your opponent when you are sitting on his torso.

Attacker's Objectives:

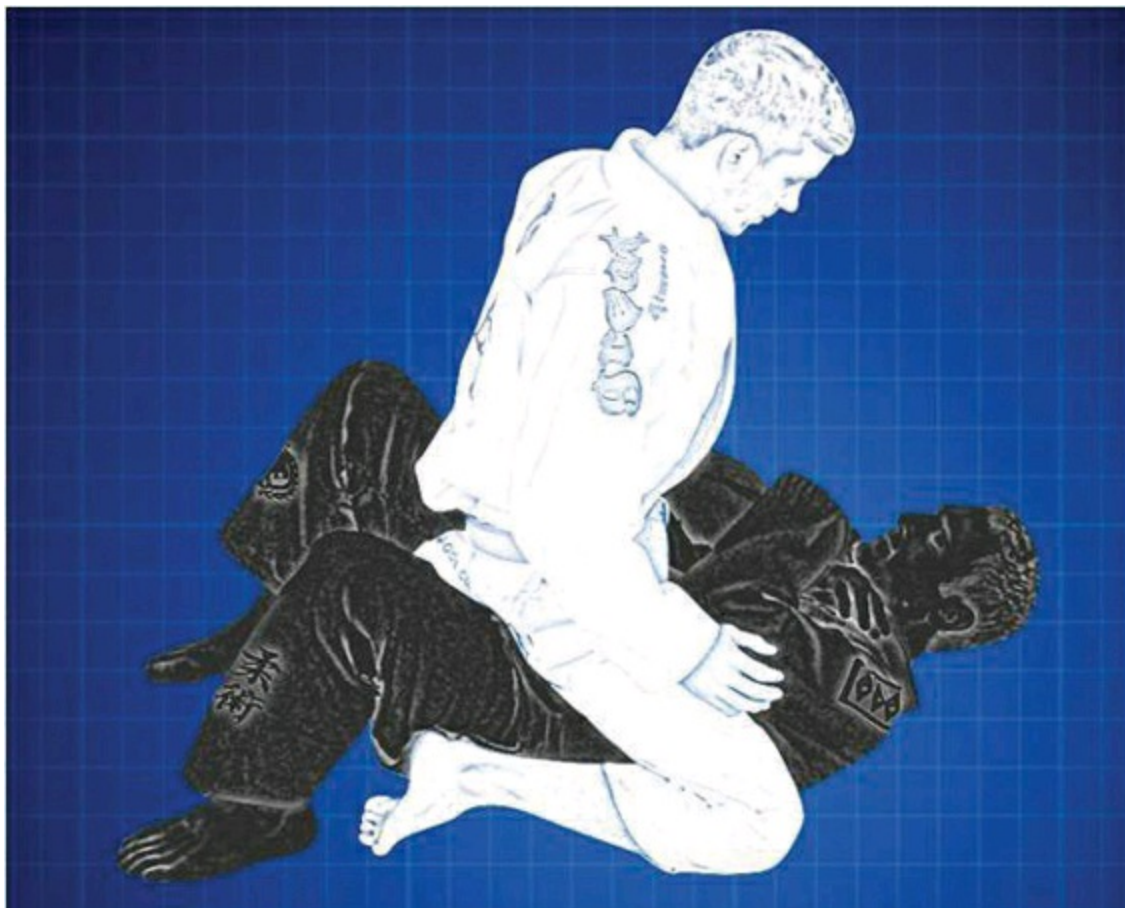
1. Submit the opponent
2. Improve position by taking back mount

Defender's Objectives:

1. Escape to a safer position

Strengths:

- Great control over the opponent because gravity is working for you.
- Many attacking options, especially chokes and arm-locks.



Mount is second only to the Back mount when it comes to positional dominance

Weaknesses:

- This position can feel unbalanced, especially for beginners.

Offensive Tips:

- Keep your feet tucked in against your opponent's body at all times.
- Keep your balance by keeping your head centred over your hips.
- Keep your knees wide and your hips low for extra pressure.

Defensive Tips:

- Again, always keep one hand near your neck to protect against chokes.
- Keep your elbows close in towards your centre to prevent being arm-locked.

Side Mount

This is usually the beginner's choice of dominant positions because it is quite stable and

reasonably easy to hold an opponent. You are in side-mount when you are perpendicular to your opponent, with your chest on his chest.

Attacker's Objectives:

1. Improve position by moving to mount, back mount or knee on chest positions.
2. Submit the opponent



The side mount is a stable and versatile attacking position

Defender's Objectives:

1. Escape to a safer position

Strengths:

- Very stable and versatile position. Its many variations allow you to adjust to your opponents movements easily.

Weaknesses:

- It can be hard to submit from here, especially against negative opponents.

Offensive Tips:

- If you can keep both of your opponent's shoulders pinned to the mat, i.e. not allowing him to turn in towards you or out away from you, it will be very difficult for him to escape. (See the chapter titled B.O.S.S. later in the book).

- Keep your legs and feet away from your opponent's legs and feet. This will help prevent you from being pulled back into his guard.

Defensive Tips:

- Try to keep your elbows and forearms between your torso and your opponent's torso. This will provide a base from which you can start to push him away and create space.

Black defends correctly by having his arms in the correct 'posture'

Knee on Chest

Knee on chest is different to the other control positions in that it offers the attacker a much higher degree of mobility. If you have good balance you can use it to completely dominate an opponent and set-up many attacks.

Attacker's Objectives:

1. Submit the opponent
2. Improve their position

Defender's Objectives:

1. Escape to a safer position

Strengths:

- This position can be extremely demotivating to the opponent.
- It is a reasonably mobile control position - it is easy to disengage and transition to other positions.

Weaknesses:

- Is not as stable as conventional side control and can become unstable, especially for beginners with poor balance.

Offensive Tips:

- Keep your weight on your opponent by keeping the foot of the attacking knee off the floor.
- The lower your hips, the more pressure your opponent will feel and the better your balance will be.
- Control at least one of your opponent's arms.

Defensive Tips:

- Resist the temptation to put your hand on the knee that's on your chest as doing so will usually get you submitted.



The knee on chest is a disheartening position for your opponent



White makes Black carry more of his weight by keeping his right toes off the mat



White stabilises himself and increases his pressure by keeping his hips low



By putting his hand on white's knee, Black is in danger of being arm-locked

North-South

North South is considered more of an 'in-between' position. We usually fall back to north south when the opponent is about to escape the side mount, or when we want to set up the specific submission known as the kimura.



Switching to North south can help you maintain the top position

Attacker's Objectives:

- Improve position by transitioning to side mount, or mount or the back
- Submit the opponent

Defender's Objectives:

- Escape to a safer position

Strengths:

- It provides a good fallback position when opponent is about to escape side-mount.

Weaknesses:

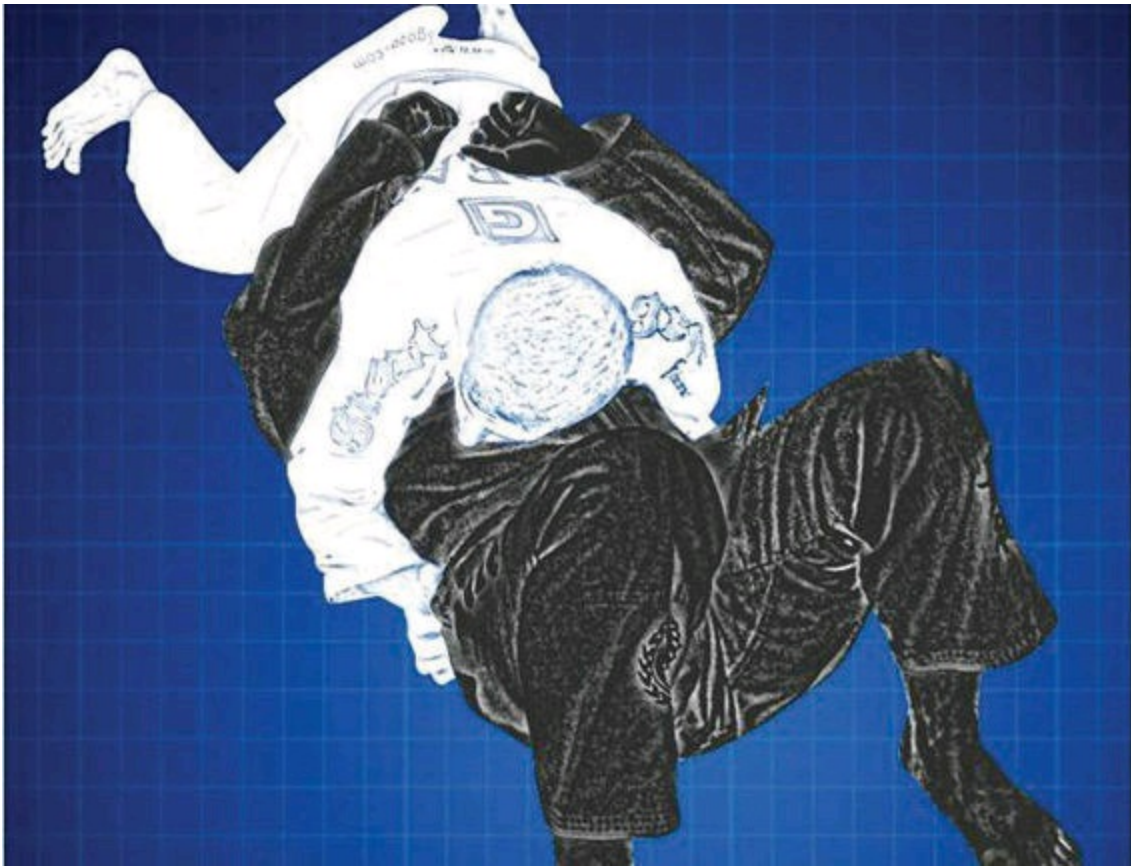
- There are relatively few attacking options available.

Offensive Tip:

- If you can 'hook' your elbows underneath your opponent's armpits it will be very difficult for him to escape.
- Keep your hips low to floor to put your full weight on the opponent.

Defensive Tip:

- Just like with side-mount try to get your elbows between your torso and his.



White has more control when hooking under Black's armpits



Black defends the North south position well by having his elbows in 'posture'

The 'Turtle'

The turtle is another 'in-between' position in that it usually occurs right after an opponent has escaped from a more powerful position such as mount or side mount.

Attacker's Objectives:

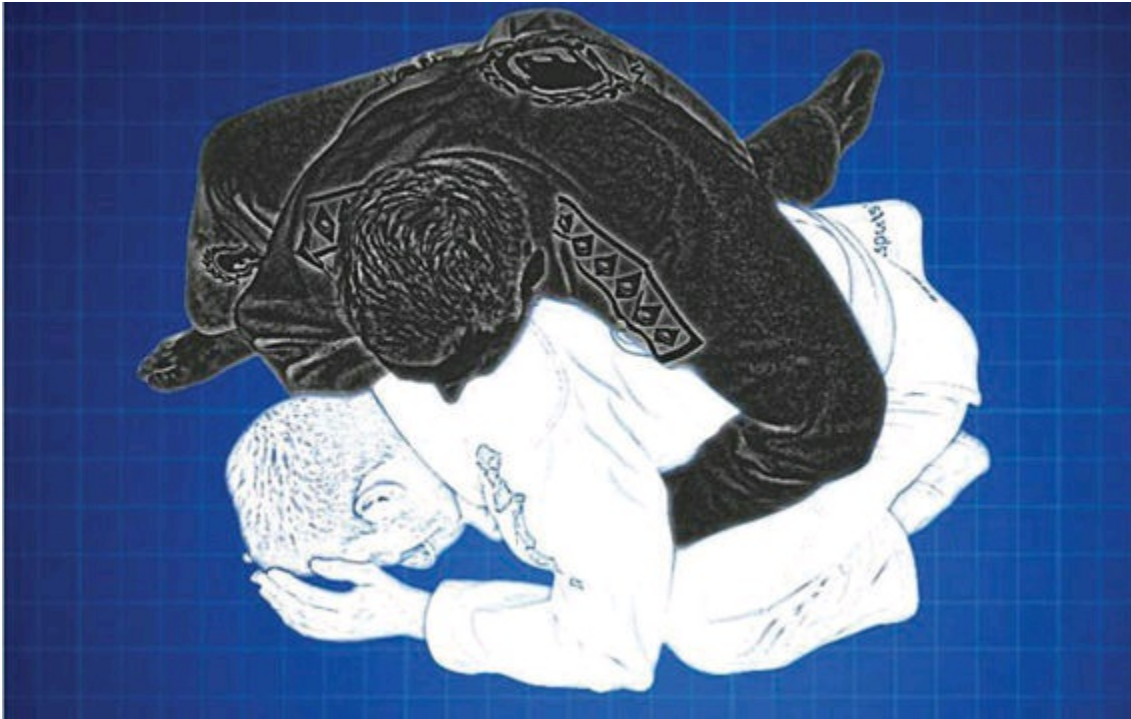
1. Submit the opponent
2. Take the Back
3. Turn the opponent over to side-mount

Defender's Objectives:

1. Escape to a safer position

Strengths:

- This is the most mobile control position of all.



Weaknesses:

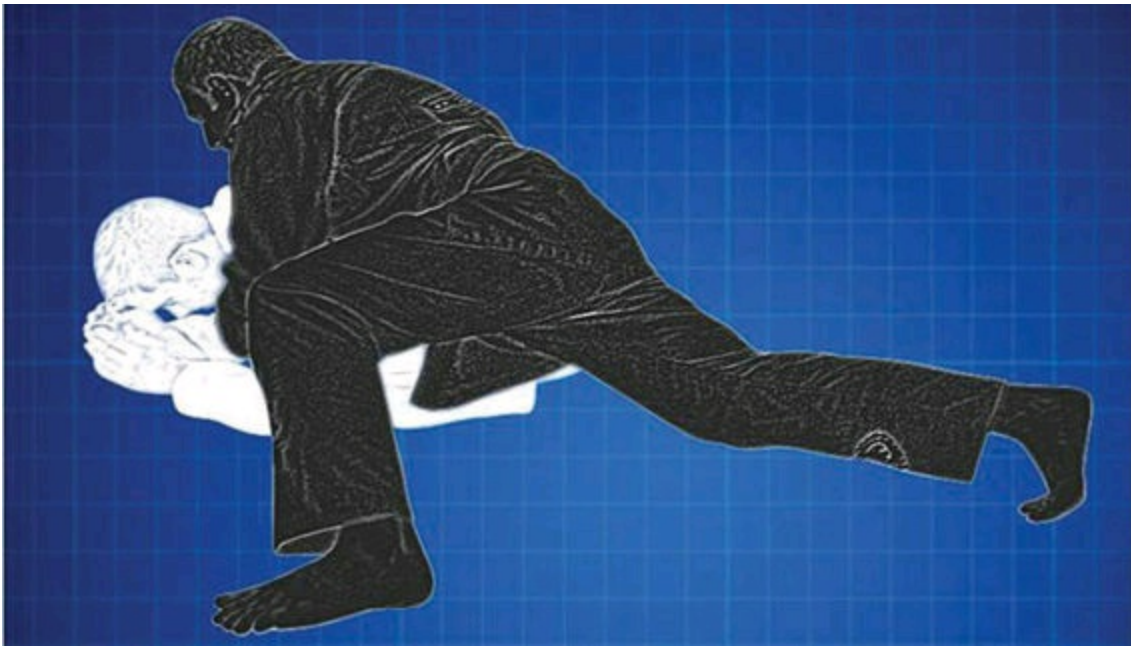
- It can be hard to find any openings if the opponent is being very negative.

Offensive Tips:

- Keep your weight on your opponent by keeping your knees off the floor.
- Constantly drive your hips against your opponent. If you release this hip pressure he can roll back to guard.

Defensive Tips:

- Protect your neck at all times as it is vulnerable to chokes and strangles in this position.
- Keep your elbows tucked in tight on top of your thighs to prevent your opponent from getting his hooks in.



Black maximises his gravitational advantage by keeping his knees off the floor



White defends well by keeping his elbows on top of his thighs and his hands against his neck

Guard

Guard is the most commonly encountered position in BJJ so we will cover it in more depth. A 'guard' can be loosely defined as any position in which you are beneath your opponent and are using your legs to control him by wrapping them around his torso or one of his legs.

The three main variations of guard are:



The 'spider Guard' is a complex and effective guard variation

1. Closed Guard

Attacker's Objectives:

- Improve position by sweeping opponent over and getting to the top
- Improve position by taking the back
- Submit the opponent

Defender's Objectives:

- Improve the position by freeing yourself from his legs and moving to a control position. This is known as 'passing the guard'.

Strengths:

- This is the safest form of guard and therefore the most difficult to pass.
- There are numerous options available to submit your opponent and also some effective sweeps.

Weaknesses:

- Less easy to sweep opponent than from other, more mobile guard variations
- Limited attacking options available when the opponent has 'postured' and is being

defensive.

Tips for the Attacker:

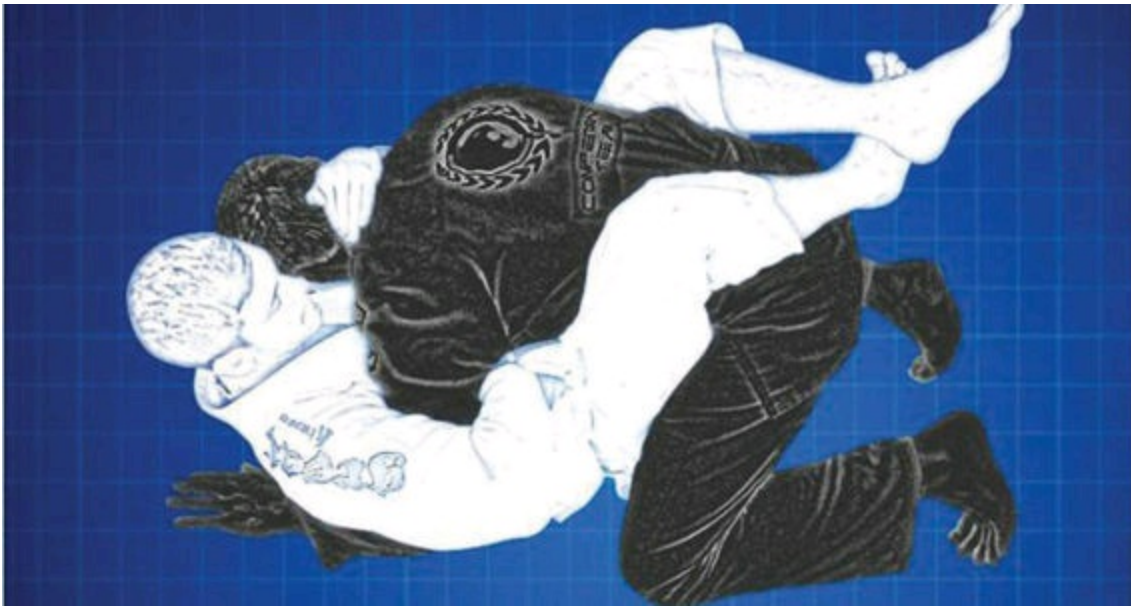
- Don't open your guard unless you have grips on your opponent.
- Try to break your opponent's posture (by pulling his head down), it will be a lot easier to attack him from this position.
- Try to draw one of your opponent's elbows across his center-line. This sets up submissions and back-takes.

Tips for the Defender:

- Maintain good posture by keeping your head up.
- Avoid over-extending your arms and gifting your opponent an armlock.



The closed Guard is the safest and most defensive of all the guard variations



White keeps Black controlled effectively by trapping one of his arms and keeping his head down



By moving Black's arm across the center-line, white sets up many attacks



By maintaining good posture, Black avoids many of the dangers of white's closed Guard

2. Open Guard

The open guard is perhaps the most complex of all the positions in jiu jitsu. Within it, there are countless permutations, including De La Riva Guard, Inverted Guard, X-Guard, Z-Guard, Tornado-Guard etc. And there are new variations being developed all the time.



The X-Guard offers many opportunities for sweeps

Attacker's Objectives:

- Improve position by sweeping opponent over and getting to the top
- Improve position by taking the back
- Submit the opponent

Defender's Objectives:

- Improve the position by passing
- Submit the opponent using foot / leg-locks

Strengths:

- There are a multitude of sweep options available.

Weaknesses:

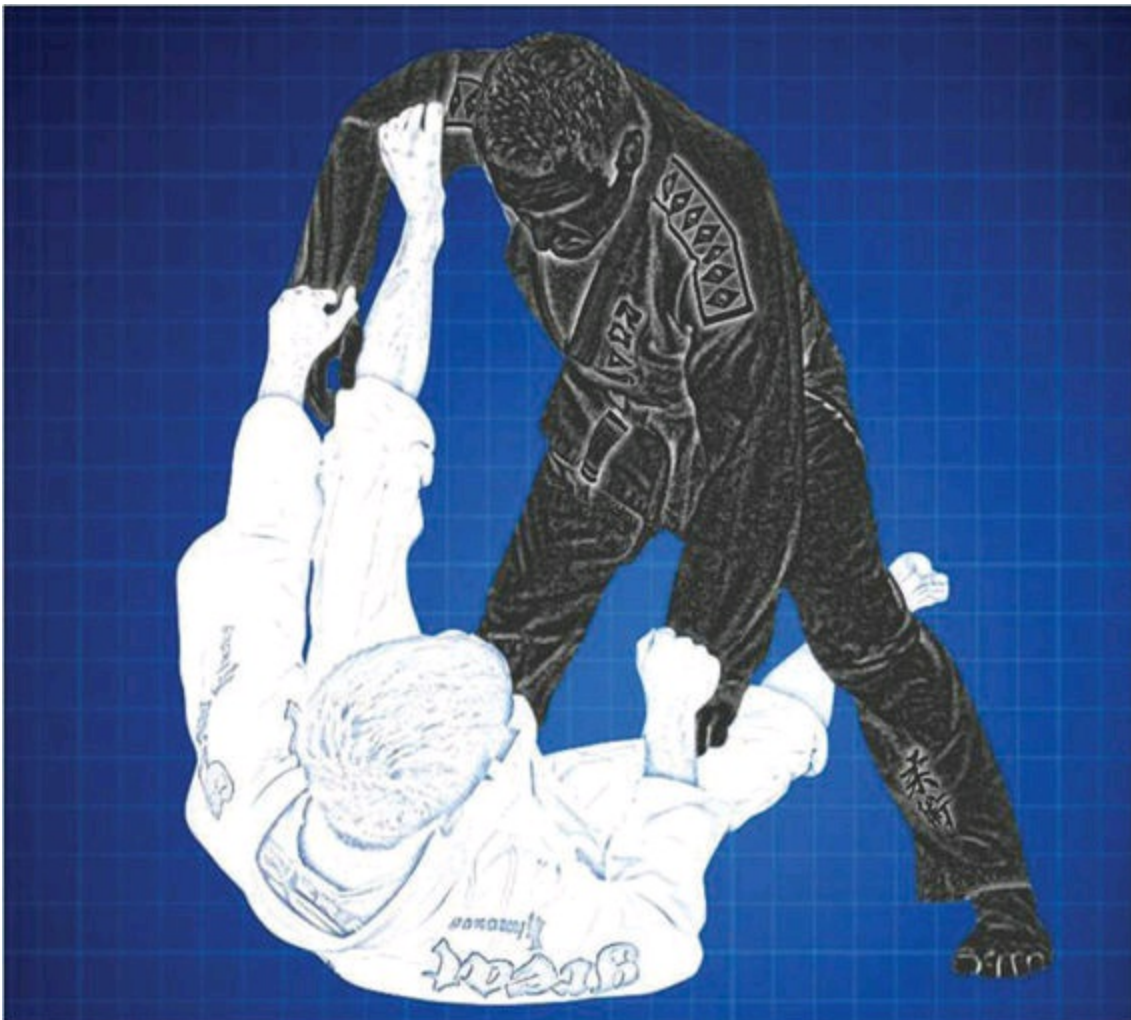
- It is easier for opponent to pass your guard, because it is already open.

Offensive Tips:

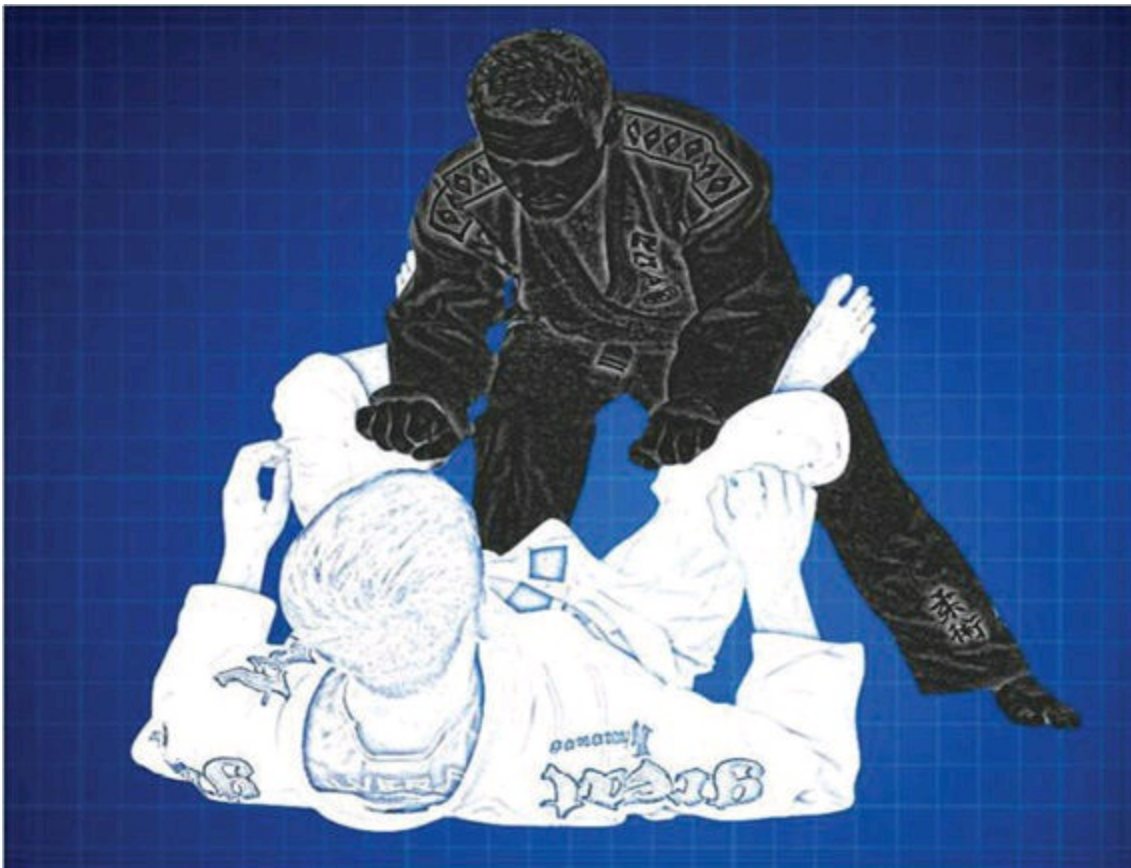
- Make sure your feet and legs are working for you, they should never be on the floor, but instead pushing or pulling your opponent behind his knees, on his hips or against his shoulders and biceps.
- Never let your opponent have grips on both of your legs.

Defensive Tips:

- If you can get grips on your opponent's legs, especially the inside of his knees, it will be easy to move them out the way and pass.



White improves his open Guard by keeping his feet active and off the floor



Black attacks the open guard effectively as he is holding at the white's knees with his elbows inside

3. Half Guard

The half-guard has become very popular over the past decade. In fact, some schools build their whole system off the half-guard. It's a good position but in my opinion a little bit overrated, because no matter how good you are from that position, you will always be at a disadvantage against a strong top-player.

Attacker's Objectives:

- Improve position by sweeping opponent over and getting to the top
- Improve position by taking the opponent's back
- Submit the opponent

Submit the opponent:

- Defender's Objectives
- Improve the position by passing to side mount or taking the back.

Strengths:

- There are many sweeping options available.

Weaknesses:

- It can be weak against strong top players.

Tips for the Attacker:

- As a general rule, keep one of your shoulders off the ground as you have no leverage when your upper back is flat on the mat.

- Never let your opponent get control of your head.
- Keep your arms between your torso and your opponent's

Tips for the Defender:

- Flatten your opponent onto his back and make sure he's looking away from you by controlling his head.



White entangles Black's far leg to control him with the half-Guard



By creating a frame with his arms, white can defend the half-guard more easily



Using shoulder-pressure against white's jaw, Black dominates the half-Guard

Don't over-specialise

As you progress you will find that you naturally prefer fighting from certain positions more than others. Most jiu-jitsukas are more specialized in certain areas. Specialization is good, but over-specialization breeds weakness. Try not to become too devoted to any particular area at the expense of others, especially as a beginner. It's far smarter to develop a balanced game and then specialise.

General Tips on Positions

1. Creating and Removing Space

There is a maxim in grappling that states: "When being controlled, create space – When controlling, take space away" When being controlled by your opponent, you will require momentum to move his and/or your body when you initiate your escape. You will not be able to achieve this momentum without room to move. Thus it is important to create space between your opponent and yourself. Conversely, while controlling your opponent you will want to remove as much space as possible between him and yourself, and prevent him from creating any open area in which to move.



By using an explosive bridge, Black creates space between himself and Black

2. Build your game off a solid defence

When asked the secret to his success on the mat, 10-time BJJ world champion Roger Gracie will tell you that he built his game off a foundation of a great defence.

If you have an airtight defence, you will be able to be more confident and relaxed while grappling, because you will know that should you inadvertently find yourself in a poor position, you will be able to escape from it with ease.

Few things are as disheartening to a grappler as an opponent that cannot be held and who brushes off decent submission attempts effortlessly. If you never allow yourself to be placed in near-submissions nor allow your opponent to take your back, the day will come when you unwillingly end up there. As you will have had little practice getting out of these positions, you will more than likely be dominated or perhaps even submitted.

Admittedly, you are likely to tap out many times while testing and refining your defensive game. No one likes to submit, but it is better to do it during training than during competition. In addition to this, being able to fight defensively from any position will give you a deeper understanding into all mechanics of the position, and have the spillover effect of improving your attacking game as well.

The Three Pillars of a Black Belt

In order to maximize your potential as a jiu-jitsuka, it's not enough to just head to class every day and go through the motions, instead a more broad based and holistic approach should be taken towards your training.

I have created a system that has worked for myself and hundreds of my students based around the three pillars I believe are necessary to become a quality jiu jitsu black belt. These pillars are **A**tttribute Maximization, **C**onceptual Understanding, **T**echnical Knowledge, or **ACT** for short.

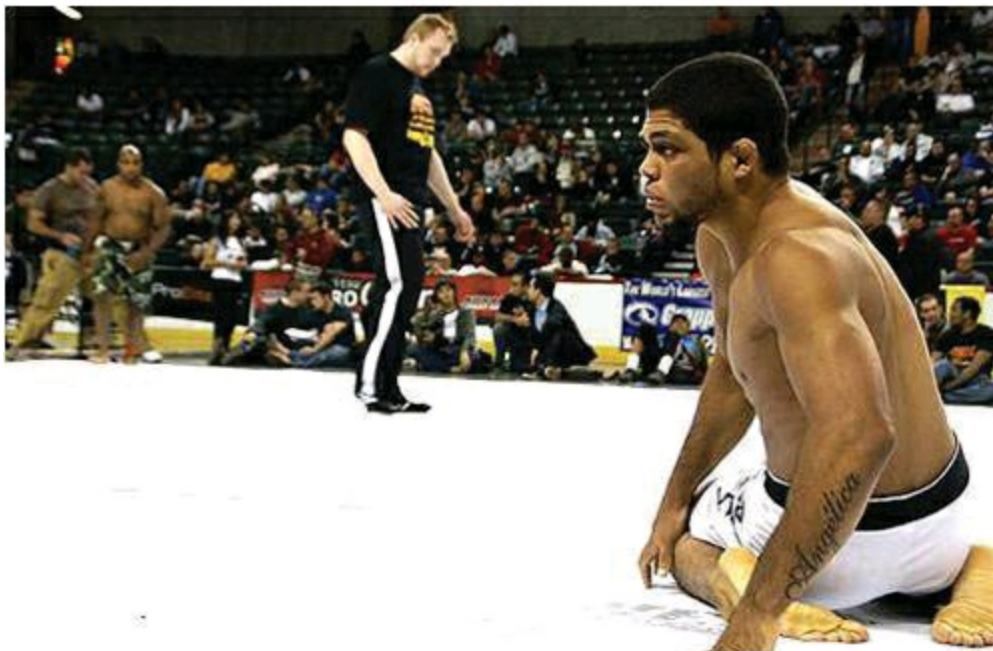
Attribute Maximization

Attributes include, strength, power, flexibility, pressure sensitivity, balance, coordination and endurance.

Jiu-jitsu is a highly athletic endeavour. It is one of the most intense of all martial arts and sports, and demands a lot physically from those who practice it. You need to maximize your attributes if you want to maximize your jiu-jitsu.

After Royce Gracie's early wins in the UFC over much bigger and stronger opponents, there began a popular misconception in the grappling arts that size and strength were not important, and that technique was all that mattered.

A lot of jiu-jitsu guys make statements like "strength is not important, all you need is technique." This is simply not true. Stronger, fitter individuals have a huge advantage over others. This is why the 250 lbs, rugby-playing white belt is usually much harder to spar with than the 140 lbs, super-skilled purple belt. This is also why the absolute division at the world champs is almost never won by lightweights.



Andre Galvao is a BJJ athlete who has maximized all of his physical attributes

It is true that the leverage afforded by grappling techniques often allows those with lesser attributes to defeat larger, stronger opponents. However there is no denying that being more powerful, faster or fitter than someone gives you an advantage over him, regardless of his level of technique. It is when you combine great attributes with technical and conceptual knowledge you have the makings of an exceptional grappler.

The good news is that most attributes can be improved through intelligent, specific training - this is discussed in more detail in later chapters.

Conceptual Understanding

Conceptual Understanding refers to the awareness of the principles and theories that form the foundation of the art. These include things like leverage, biomechanics and breath control.

There are an infinite number of technical situations in jiu-jitsu, and new ones are being developed all the time. You will never be able to learn every single attack, defense, counter and combination. There will always be holes in your game. Conceptual understanding fills in the gaps in your technical knowledge. It allows you to create your own movements and adapt quickly when you do not have a technical response to a particular circumstance.

For example, let's say during a sparring session that your opponent has a great guard and you feel him set up a sweep which you are not familiar with. Although you might not know the ideal technical defense to his attack, if your understanding of the concept of "base" is good it will still be difficult for him to complete his move.

Later in this book we will explore some of the most important concepts in more detail.

Technical Knowledge

Technical Knowledge is a framework of response patterns to specific situations, usually following the simple formula of If 'x', then 'y'. An example, "**If** I am in guard and my opponent puts his hand on my chest, **then** I trap his arm, step on his hip..." etc.

Most BJJ academies focus heavily on this aspect of training. The beauty of a technique is that it usually represents the most efficient way of accomplishing an objective. I say usually, because even great techniques are often replaced by more effective variations.

Long-time black belt and instructor Roy Harris speaks of "Technique Collectors". These are the guys who watch every single YouTube video of the most advanced, inverted x-guard sweeps and owns every single jiu-jitsu instructional DVD on the planet, but ask them to mount and choke anyone in sparring and they're completely lost.

Technical knowledge can be broadly categorized into depth and breadth. Technique collectors usually have great breadth of knowledge, or the 'know a little about a lot'. Good fighters usually have great depth of knowledge, i.e. they specialize in only a few positions or techniques, but they know these really well. The great jiu-jitsu practitioners have both breadth and depth of technical knowledge.

The best ways I have found to improve technique are physical repetition and visualization, both of which we will cover later on.

Becoming Complete

To become a complete jiu jitsuka you need to be strong, have a familiarity of the concepts underpinning the art, and also have great technique. Try to identify any aspects where you are deficient, focus on improving them, and ultimately make them your strengths.

Progressing Through the Belt System

Now that you have laid the groundwork for your learning process, let's explore the actual architecture which underpins the art of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu.

The Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu Belt System is far stricter than in most other martial arts. It can take upwards of 10 years to achieve the black belt.

As there are only a few belts, you may spend a long time on each one. Also, your progress will not be linear. You will spend weeks or months on plateaus before being rewarded with a jump in ability. Sometimes it will actually seem as if you are getting worse instead of better. But the plateau is actually your friend and is itself an indicator of progress. It is those who have the mental strength to keep going when they find themselves on a plateau that break through to a higher level of ability.

Several years ago, black belt Roy Harris wrote a good article detailing what was expected at each belt. I have extrapolated on this and provided a breakdown of what I expect from my students at each belt. No matter what, remember to enjoy the process. Don't be too focused on the achieving the next belt or winning competitions etc.

White Belt

As a white belt, your goal is to create a frame of reference for your future learning. You need to learn what you don't know. Think of BJJ as a jigsaw puzzle that you are trying to figure out. The white-belt is where you create the 'outline' of the picture, before filling in the centre. Using flow diagrams will help greatly - see the later chapter in this book.



The complete BJJ Belt system

Learning to relax is an absolutely essential skill and white belt is the best time to acquire it. I cannot overstate how important this is. The only way you will be able to do this by learning to control your ego. Try to remember that nothing is expected of you at this stage. Try to focus your energy on the experience instead of 'winning' or 'losing'.

Some Suggested Goals at White Belt:

1. Learn the names of each of the main positions and acquire a basic familiarity with each of them. e.g. be able to identify the guard position.
2. Learn to control your ego by accepting that you will be beaten by the more advanced students. If you are big and naturally athletic this will be even more important for you.
3. Get used to the 'feeling' of jiu jitsu. Pay attention to how your body moves on the ground and the way a resisting opponent uses his strength and weight.
4. Choose one technique and try to master it.

Blue Belt

I once asked Roger Gracie, the best jiu jitsu fighter in history, what made him so good. After thinking about it for a while, he replied: "I built my game off a solid defence. I first made it almost impossible for anybody to tap me out."

Hearing that made a deep impression on me. From that point on I focused almost exclusively on my defence. I will not give any of my students a blue belt unless they have a decent defence. I want to see them able to escape from all the major positions with relative ease.

Secondly, You will need to learn to pass the guard. To me, passing the guard is the most difficult aspect of jiu-jitsu. You will spend a great deal of time in your opponents' guards, so you should become very proficient at dealing with the position.

Some Suggested Goals at Blue Belt:

1. Have two solid escapes from Mount, Back Mount and Side Mount.
2. Master two techniques for passing the guard.
3. Compete in at least one Competition.

Purple Belt

This is the belt of movement and momentum. You will learn how to use the momentum of your own weight as well as that of your opponent to achieve your movement objectives. A lot of the 'wasted movement' that exemplified your game at the previous belts will be shaved away.

Purple belt is also where you will finish laying the foundation of your entire game. As mentioned earlier, I suggest that this foundation be a solid defence. You should try to spend your time at this belt focusing on the weakest aspects of your jiu jitsu - these are known as the 'holes in your game'.

A good purple belt has a great offence and is dangerous from any position. This is also where the jiu jitsuka should start learning to attack using combinations of techniques.

As a purple belt your guard should be very effective. You should have a familiarity with all the different guards and specialize in at least one, preferably two.

Some Suggested Goals at Purple Belt:

1. Have 3 combination attacks from guard position.
2. Have 3 submissions from Side Mount, Mount and Back Mount.
3. Become familiar with all the variants of the Guard position.

Brown Belt

Although not yet a master of the art, there will be very, very few positions or situations a

brown belt is unfamiliar with. By now you will have your own style and will probably be recognized as a top-player, bottom-player, all-rounder etc.

A decent brown belt is able to teach the art to others. In fact, this is when many BJJ players realize that they have a passion for teaching and decide to embark on coaching as a career path. He also understands that teaching is a good way to consolidate the knowledge he has gained up to this point.

A brown belt is evil from the top positions. In mount and side mount he knows how to use his body-weight and makes sure the person on the bottom feels every ounce of it. He will pass the guard at even the narrowest window of opportunity. His balance will make him very difficult to sweep.

At this stage, he will also have developed counters to almost all the most commonly encountered techniques. This means he will be one or two steps ahead of lower-level opponents.

He will also have several 'signature' techniques. These are moves which he has mastered and can get to work on almost anybody.

Some Suggested Goals at Brown Belt:

1. Try to teach a few classes at your academy
2. Perfect your weight distribution and balance in the top positions.
3. Work on counters to common attacks.

Black Belt

The jiu-jitsu black belt is truly a master grappler. He is a person who knows far more about his body, his mind and his limitations than the average individual.

A black belt moves with an economy of motion and grace. More importantly, he also knows when to move and when not to move. His jiu jitsu is not only effective it also looks good.

The black belt starts to look at everything with a fresh set of eyes. He can take the most basic movement that he has practised thousands of times and realize that he is still able to refine it.

He has, in a way, transcended the physical aspect of jiu jitsu, and understands that training now represents an option for his continual growth as a human being. He is humble, friendly and respectful of others. He is a highly efficient and dangerous martial artist but uses his skills and abilities to defend and teach those less capable than him.

Some Suggested Goals at Black Belt:

Understand that the journey is not over. Remain humble and continue to learn and grow.

Red Belt

Don't worry about the red belt. Seriously.

PART 3

Concepts

“Man masters nature not by force but by understanding.” - Jacob Bronowski

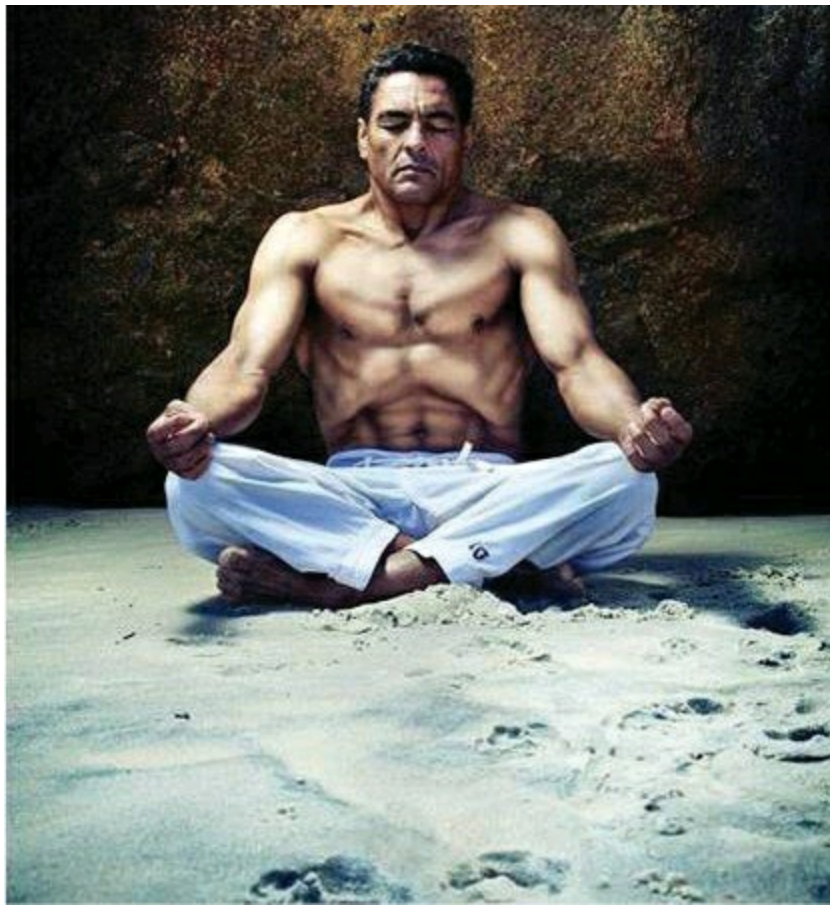
Breath Control

Breath Control is the bedrock of my jiu jitsu system. Until you can learn to control your breathing in extreme circumstances (against better opponents, while tired, when being crushed from on top), all the fancy concepts, techniques and submissions are just pie in the sky.

Breathing and Awareness

Your ability to learn and perform on the mat is linked to your state of mind, which is in turn linked to your breath. If your breathing is smooth and even, it's more likely than not that your movements will be the same. But if you're panting and gasping for air, I can assure you that your jits won't be effective or graceful.

Another interesting thing about breath control is that it can also help you deal with the ego. By concentrating on the flow of your inhalation and exhalation and on the movement of your breath through your body, you will be able to empty your mind of any distracting thoughts that may adversely affect your performance.



Rickson Gracie performing a yogic breathing technique

Breath Control supercedes fitness

You can be the fittest guy in the world, but if your breathing pattern is incorrect you will gas out. I've seen this hundreds of times. For example, a world-champion triathlete came to one of my classes a years ago. After a three-minute match against a blue belt he was wheezing his lungs out because he had no awareness of his breath.

Breathe through your nose

A great instructor of mine once told me that you can tell a good grappler by looking at him after a tough match. If he's still breathing through his nose, you know he's in control of himself and fighting intelligently.

Take full breaths

Try to avoid inhaling before having completed a full exhalation. Ideally, empty your lungs completely, and pausing for a second before taking a deep breath to the bottom of your lungs, allowing your abdomen and rib cage to expand. By doing this, you re-balance the ratio of oxygen and carbon dioxide in your blood and reduce that feeling of being 'gassed out'.

Pace your breath against your opponent's

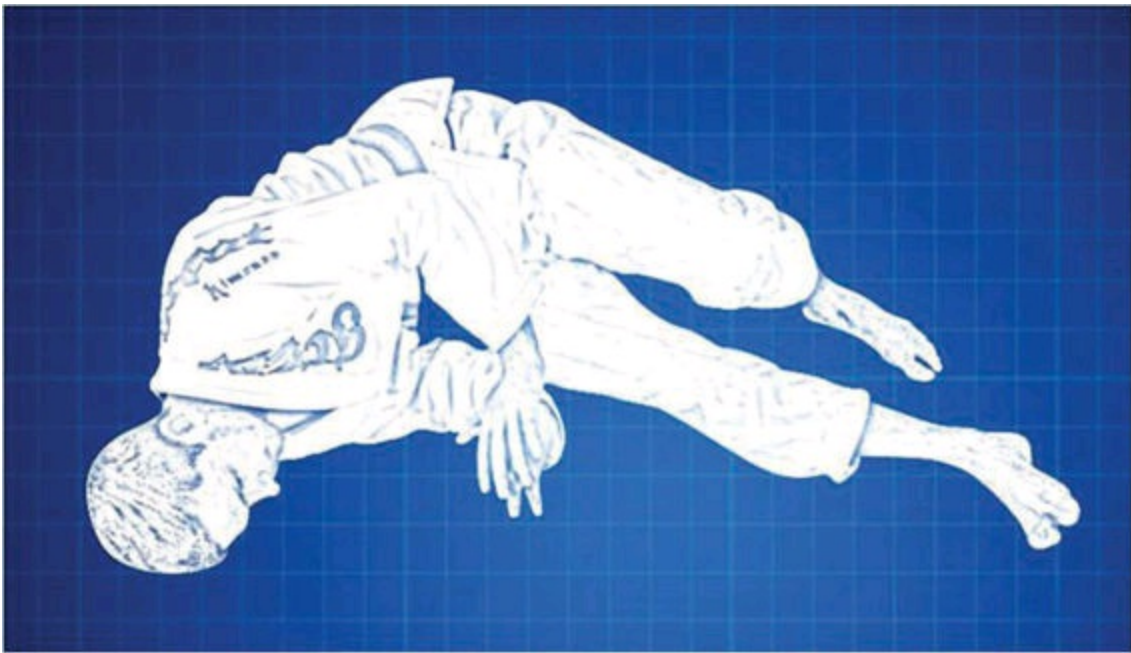
An effective way of controlling your breathing is to use the rate of your opponent's breathing to pace yours. When in a static grappling position (e.g. side mount), try to listen to your opponent's breathing – if it is at a harder and faster pace than yours, chances are he is using a lot more energy than you, and subsequently he will tire more quickly.

At the same time, if you are breathing harder and faster than your opponent, you will probably tire sooner than him. In this case, it is best to slow your breathing down. This will naturally calm your mind and allow you to think clearly. It will also reduce the overall level of muscular tension in your body. These two effects in combination will allow you to remember your techniques and perform them fluidly.

Another common error beginners make is to stop breathing before they try to 'explode' out of bad position - a more experienced grappler can use that as a 'tell' that a defensive maneuver is coming, so it's best to avoid doing it.

Use percussive breathing

An efficient way of doing this is by adopting percussive breathing, which involves normal inhalations followed by several short, sharp exhalations. These exhalations are the result of rhythmic diaphragmatic contractions. Many who have sparred with the great Rickson Gracie report having heard him make the 'tss...tss....tss' exhalations that are the hallmark of percussive breathing.



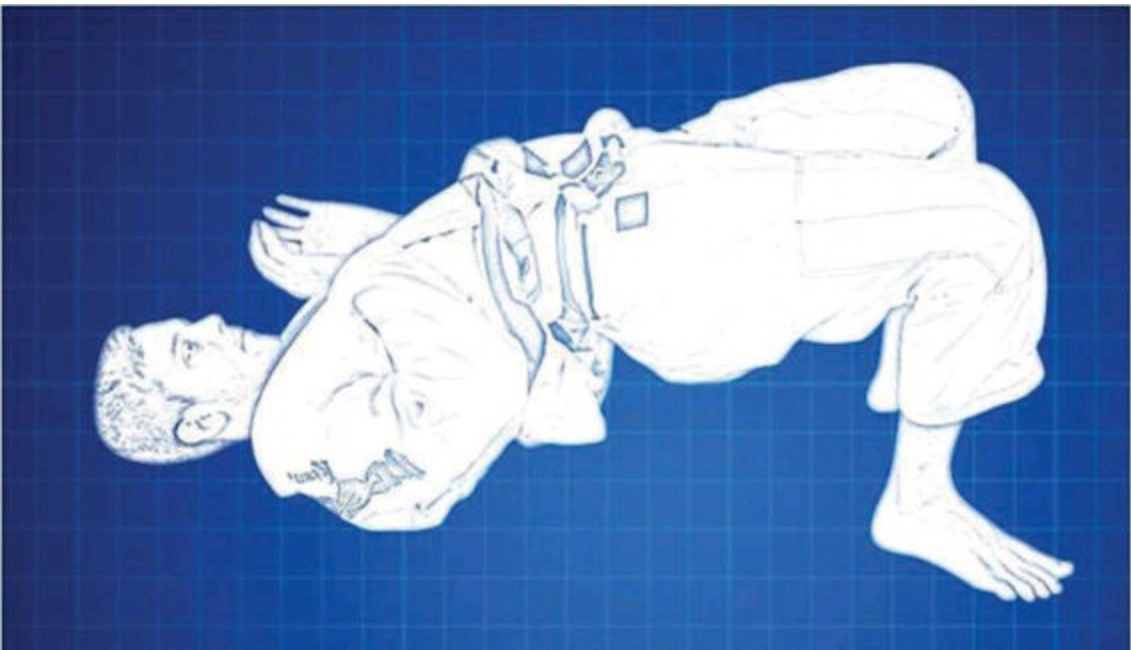
The shrimp is an example of a movement which should be performed upon exhalation

Coordinate movement and breathing

Your lungs are situated in close proximity to your spine, the largest and most complex joint system of your body. The volume of air in your lungs affects their size and consequently the flexibility of your spine.

Here's a simple test you can do yourself: Take a deep breath in and hold it. Whilst still holding your breath, bend forward and try to touch your toes. Now exhale and notice how much further your spine bends.

In general, any forward bending movement or movement in which your shoulders and hips move closer towards each other should be done upon exhalation.



The Bridge is an 'expanding' movement that should usually be accompanied by an inhalation

An example of this kind of movement would be the 'snake' or 'shrimp' escape.

Conversely, any action that requires an arching of the spine or which increases the distance between the shoulders and the hips should be accompanied by an inhalation. A good example of this would be a bridging motion.

Unfortunately, we have all been taught to exhale when performing just about any strenuous movement, so it may seem awkward at first when retraining yourself to coordinate your breathing with your movement, but after a good deal of practice it will become second nature.

Note - The Ashtanga Yoga system is exceptional for developing your breath control - I suggest you try a class.

Here is a video in which I explain breath control for jiu jitsu in further detail:

<http://tinyurl.com/pe6gono>

Dominating the Center

Between two fighters, there exists an invisible center which divides their combined mass. Whoever controls or 'dominates' this center almost always controls the fight.

The control positions of jiu jitsu, when applied correctly, naturally ensure that the attacker dominates the center, at least temporarily. Even in scrambles there will always be a 'center', and it is your job to identify it and gain control of it.

Some examples:

Example 1 - The Clinch



The center between Black and white remains neutral



White 'dominates the center' by snapping Black's head forwards

Example 2 - Knee on Chest

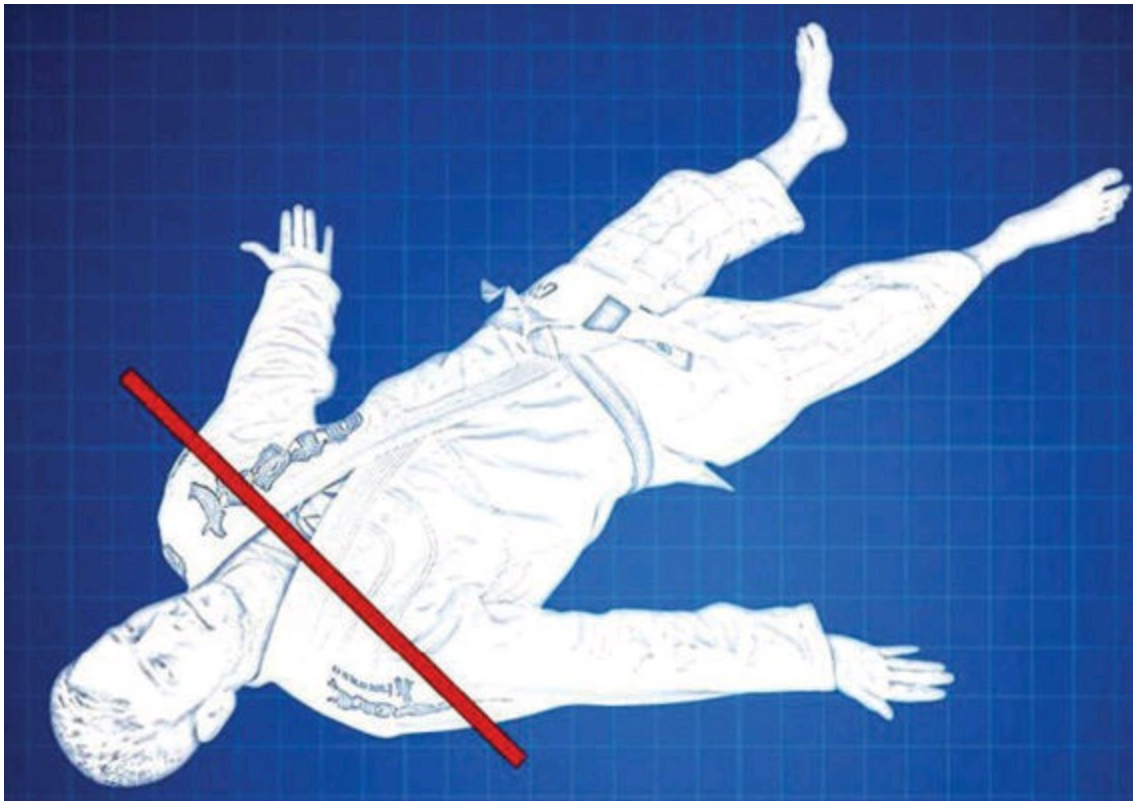
There is also a variation on this concept which I call 'Top Center & Bottom Center'.

We can divide our opponent's anatomy into top and bottom halves, each with its own center. The 'bottom center' is represented by the line running across his hips, while the top center is demarcated by the line running across his shoulders, just above his sternum.

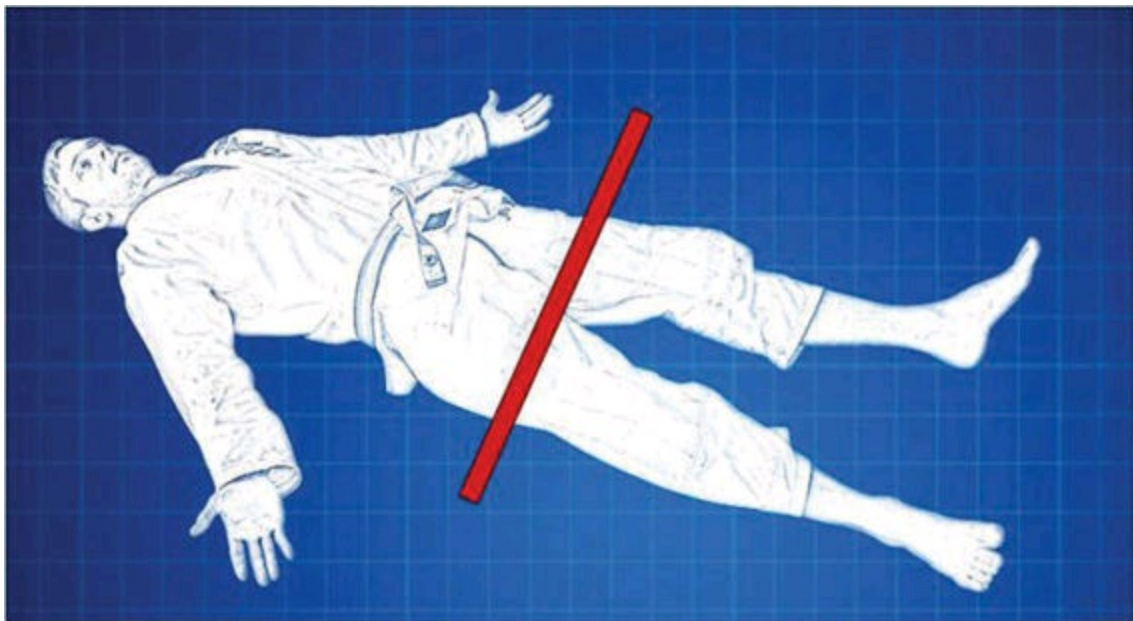
In many instances, by identifying which half of the body our technique or position is seeking to manipulate, by focusing our weight, pressure or leverage against the relevant center we can improve our control substantially.



The knee on chest position is perhaps the best example of dominating the center.



The top center runs across the shoulder line



The bottom center runs across the hips

You can see this explained in this video:

<http://tinyurl.com/mko3ncs>

Using Angles Effectively

This is one of the key concepts that I have built my whole jiu jitsu game around. I cannot tell you how many times I've found myself in a situation on the mat where I didn't know the correct technique and was able to use my understanding of angles to accomplish my objective.

In jiu jitsu, just as in any other functional martial art, you are able to apply leverage far more effectively when you have an angle on your opponent.

When I speak of angles, I am referring to the position of my spine in relation to my opponent's spine. In general, when you want to create leverage, you should try to move your spine through either a 45 or 90 degree angle in relation to your opponent's spine.

The corollary of this is that to take leverage away from an opponent, you need to remove the angle between your spine and his spine.

There are hundreds of examples of this, and part of the fun of training is identifying the angle change required and how to do it. In the meantime here are some examples to get you started.

Straight Armlock



Fig. a - Black sets up the armlock on white

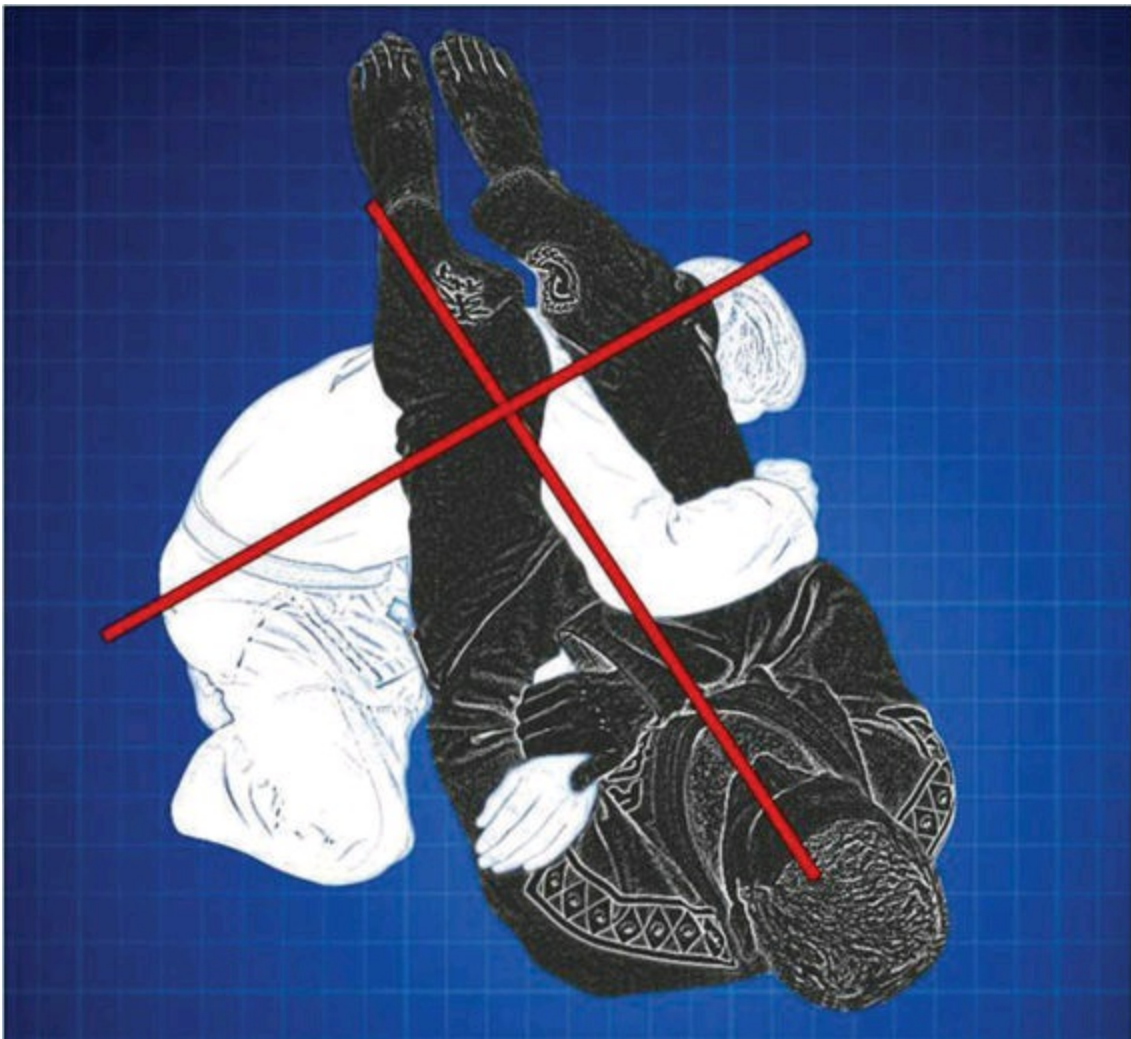


Fig b - By creating a 90 degree angle between his torso and his opponent's, Black is able to apply more leverage for the arm-lock

Bow and Arrow Choke

Perhaps my favourite example. It's a far more powerful variation of the classic lapel choke from the back, because by creating an angle between your spine and that of your opponent's, you maximise leverage potential.

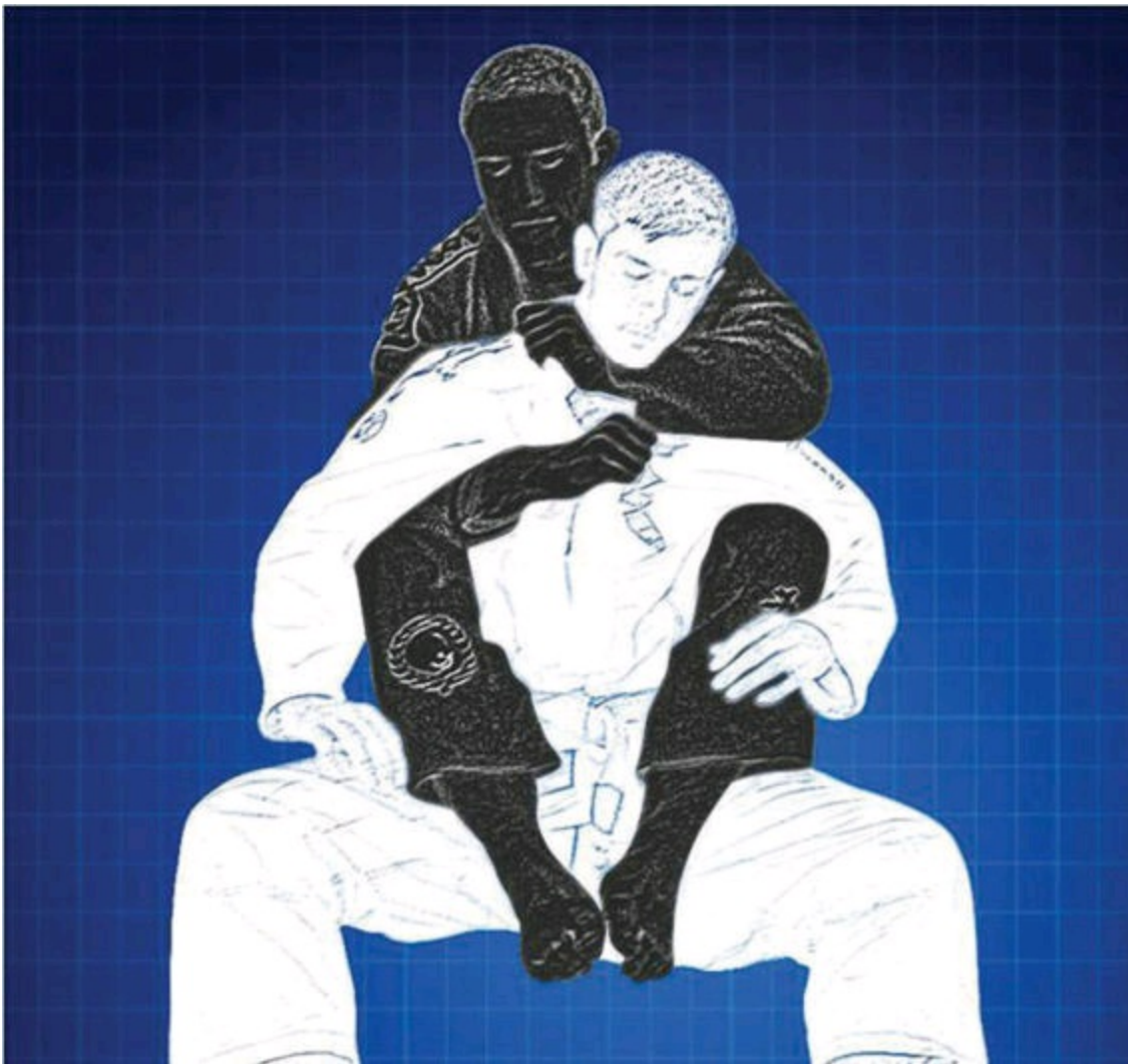


Figure a - Black attacks white from Back mount with a classic lapel strangle

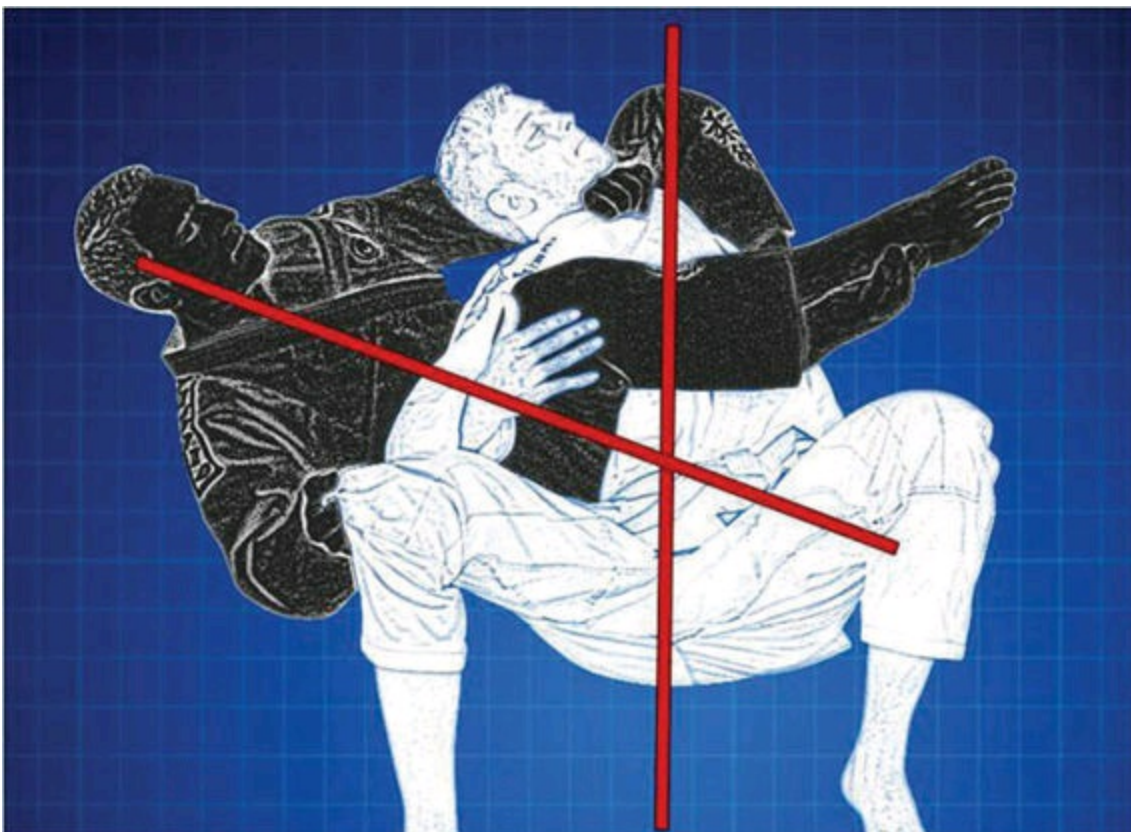


Figure b - switching to a bow and arrow choke creates an angle and massively amplifies leverage

Hitch-Hiker Escape



Figure a - white applies leverage effectively against Black with the 90 degree angle from the straight-armbar

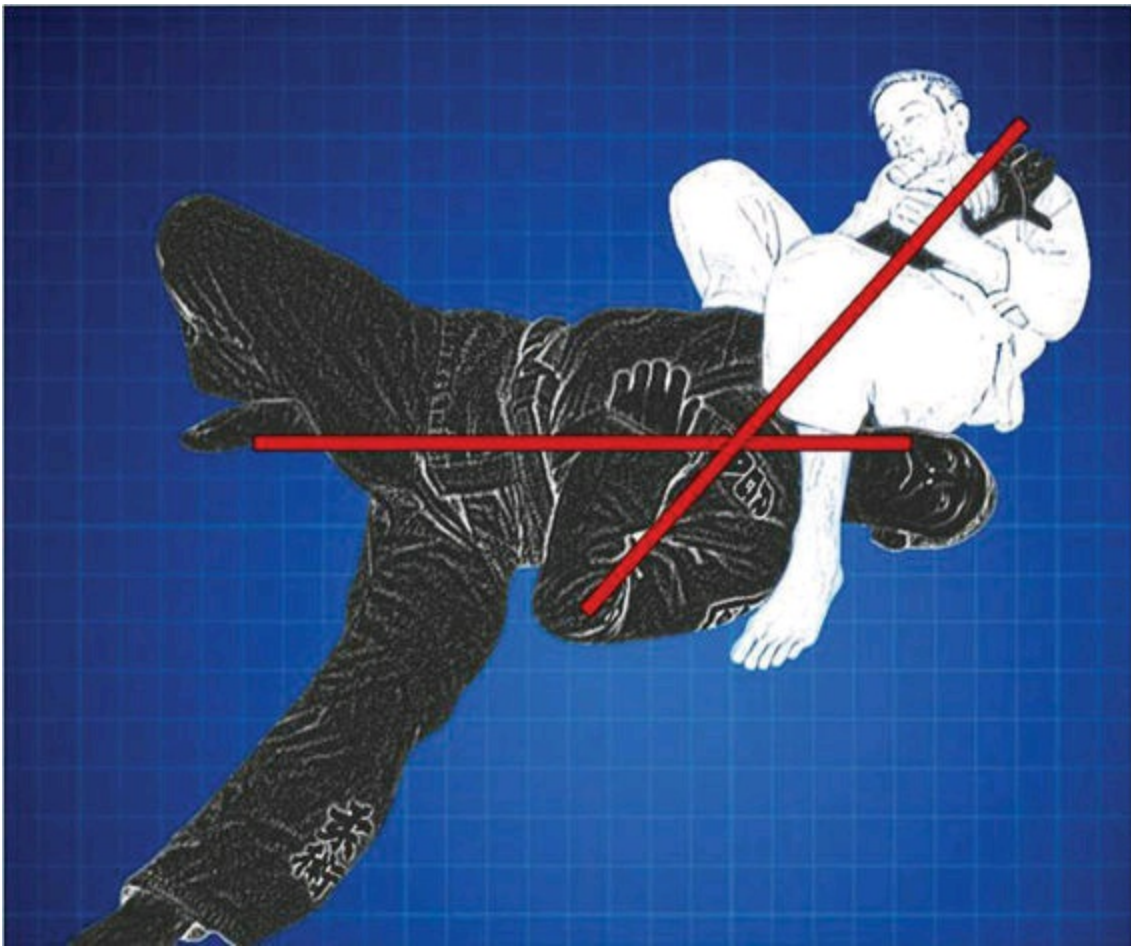


Figure b - using the hitchhiker escape Black starts to turn and remove the angle

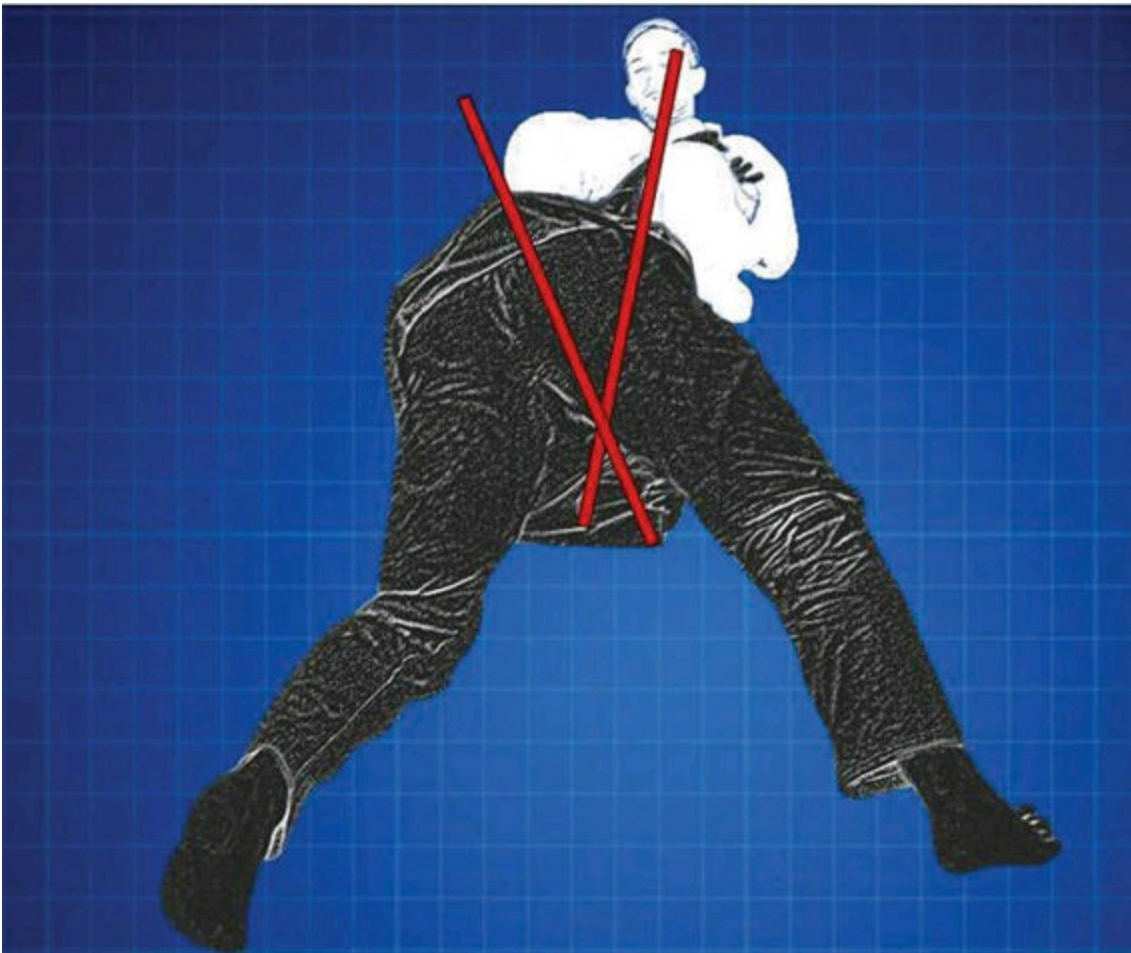


Figure c - by completing the turn with the step- over, Black completely neutralizes white's leverage

Here's a video from several years ago of me explaining this concept. Note, that it was filmed before I understood the importance of the 45 degree angle.

<http://tinyurl.com/mzznbau>

Expansion / Contraction From Center

Your center of gravity is located about 2 inches beneath your navel. When you apply leverage in jiu jitsu, usually you will either be expanding away from this center, or contracting towards it.

It is very important that you identify which of these two actions is the correct choice for particular scenarios and techniques, because using the incorrect one will drastically reduce your effectiveness at accomplishing your objective.

Expansion

Expansion involves generation of power from the glute-drive (pushing your hips forwards) and arching of the back. It's one of the most powerful physical movements a human being can do. Notable examples of techniques that employ expansion are the straight armlock from guard and the knee-bar.

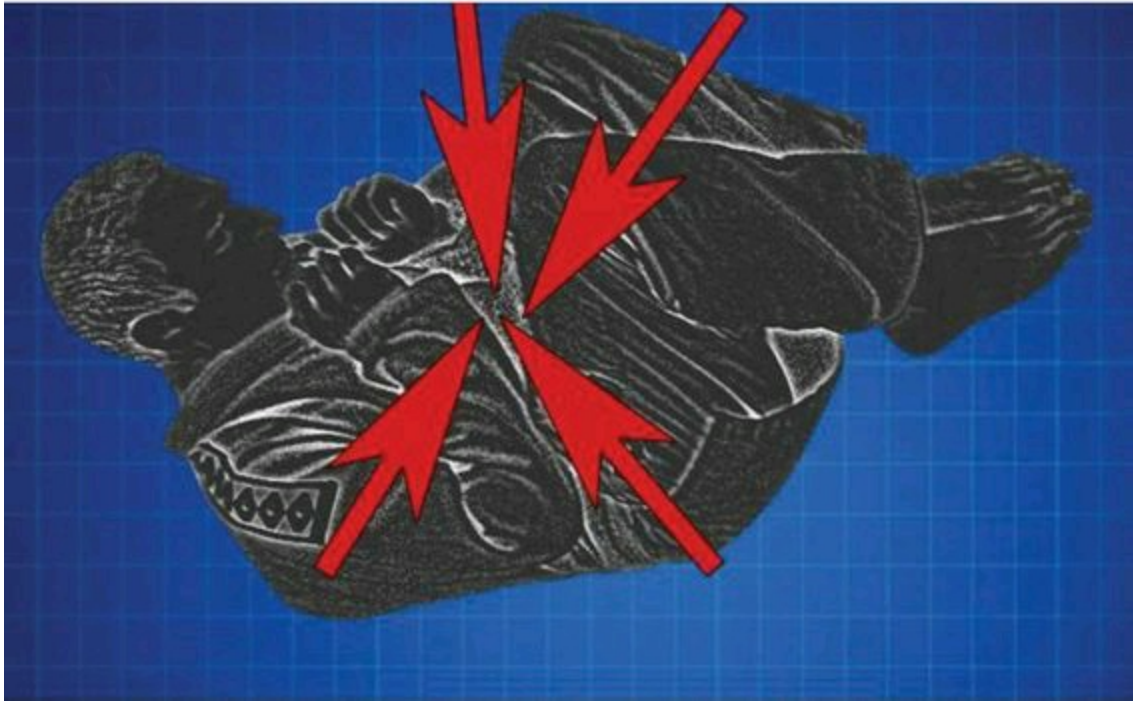


'Expansion' involves a powerful hip-drive and back-arch

Contraction

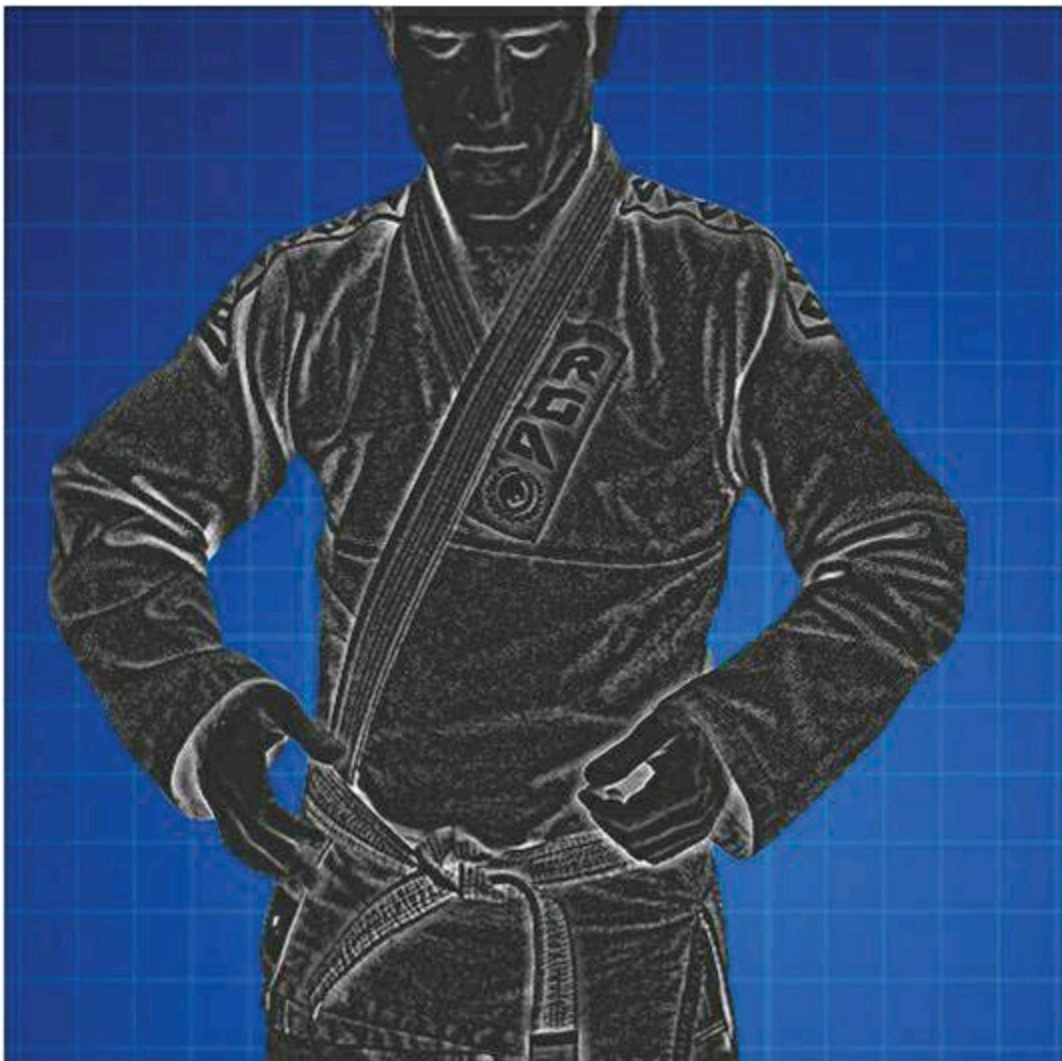
The contraction towards the center is less common. It utilizes a forward flexion of the spine in a motion similar to an abdominal crunch, and involves drawing all four limbs

inwards by tucking the knees towards the chest and the elbows in beneath the ribs. Most chokes and strangles including the cross-choke from mount and the triangle are examples of contractions towards the center.

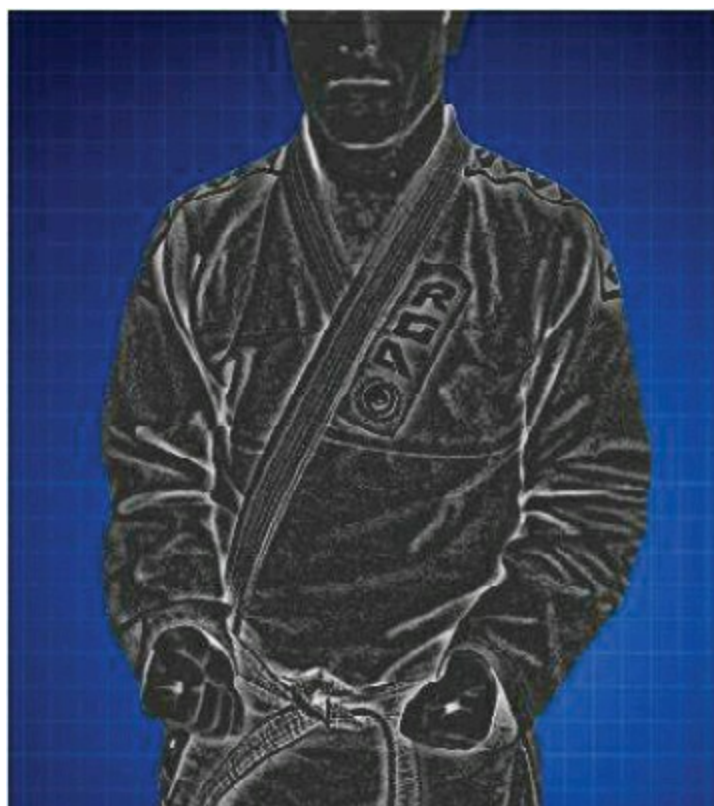


'Contraction' is characterised by a drawing in towards the center

Interestingly, drawing the elbows towards the ribs in this way represents another important reference point I call the 'position of strength'. Positioning your elbows in this manner puts your arms at their strongest anatomical position. A smart jiu jitsu guy once said "Keep your friends close and your elbows closer" - and this is what he was referring to - the Position of Strength



As your elbows flare away from your center your structure naturally weakens



By resetting to the 'position of strength' you place your arms in their strongest position possible

Try you identify these movements and amplify them when applying your techniques. Also, in your supplemental training, try to choose movements that approximate the expansion and contraction (i.e. crunches, deadlifts) and practise them consistently. Doing this will greatly improve the amount of power you can generate.

You can see a video describing the Expansion and Contraction concept in detail here:

<http://tinyurl.com/k6go4xe>

Posture & Structure

You will often hear your instructor and other jiu jitsu guys speaking of 'posture'. Identifying and maintaining good posture should be near the top of your list of grappling priorities – its importance cannot be underestimated.

Whatever position you find yourself in while grappling, before performing any action you should ask yourself if you have correct posture. When we speak of good posture, we are basically referring to a state in which your structure is efficiently held in alignment by your skeleton and the correct muscles.

The benefits of good posture are threefold:

1. Balance

When employed, good posture will almost always result in improved balance, which will make it more difficult for an opponent to break your base.

2. Energy Efficiency

It will allow your bones and joints to carry the most of the burden of gravity, which is more energy efficient than allowing the muscular system to do it exclusively.

3. Strength

The muscles that are usually used in maintaining posture are the smaller stabilizers, and these are often neglected in favor of the larger prime-mover muscles. By maintaining good posture you strengthen these stabilizing muscles which leads to improved functional strength of the entire body.

Here's is an excellent example to illustrate posture"



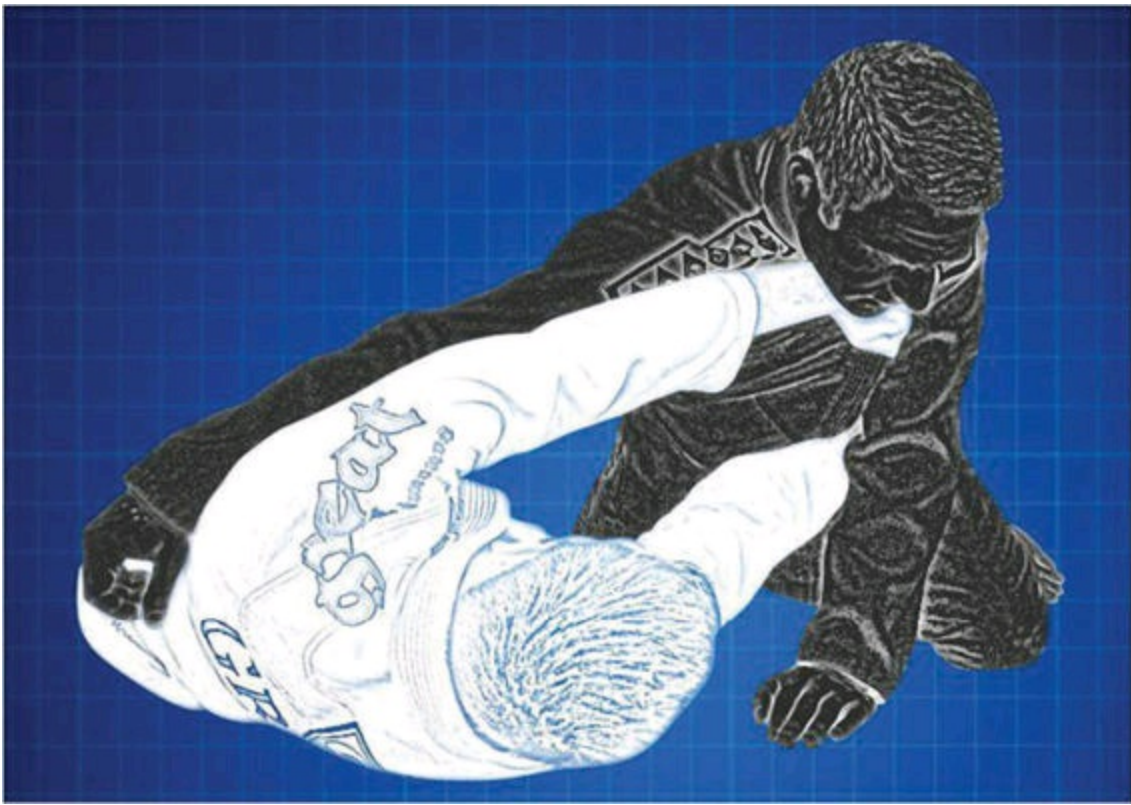
Fig. a - Black's posture in white's guard is poor as his spine is rounded and head drooping



Fig. b - Black's regains efficient structure by correcting his posture

There is a sub-concept of posture which I call 'the brace'. By locking-out specific limbs at certain times, you create a powerful structure which allows you to keep posture and/or block your opponent really efficiently.

Here's an example of the brace:



By locking out his left arm, white has used a 'brace' to create a structure and keep distance from Black

Here is a video of me explaining the concept of posture in more detail:

<http://tinyurl.com/mzs4ygb>

Power-Point and Base

When trying to manipulate your opponent through a submission, sweep or even escapes and reversals, understanding these principles can often make it far easier to accomplish your objective.

- The Base

This is the platform from which you generate your leverage. It usually lies close to your center of gravity and hips.

- The Power-point(s)

This refers to the part(s) of your opponent against which you are most directly applying your force.

The closer you bring the power-point(s) and the base to each other, the more effectively you will be able to apply your leverage.

Here are some examples:

Americana



Fig. a - Black applies the americana, but the power-point, white's wrist, is far from his base (hips)

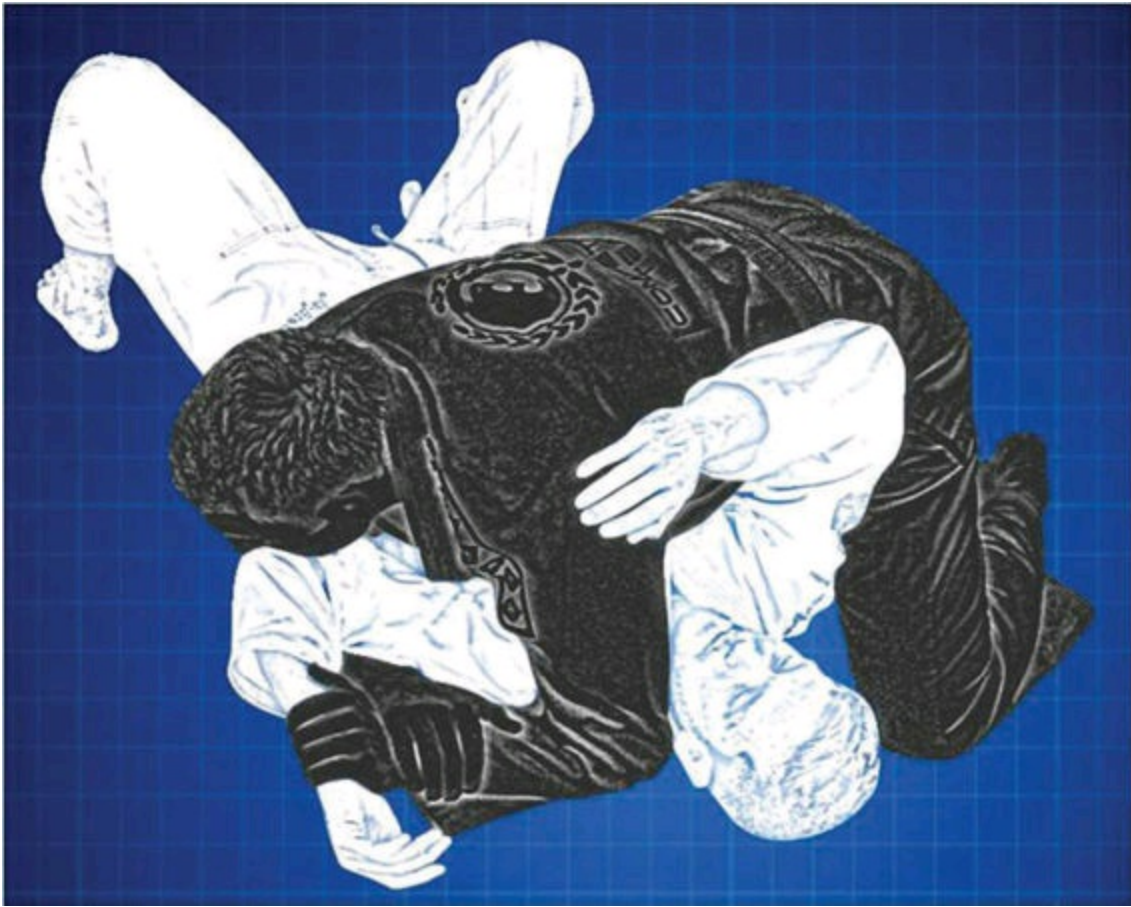


Fig. b - By pulling the power-point in closer to his base (his hips), Black increases available leverage

Scissor Sweep



Fig. a - Black's scissor sweep lacks power as his power-point (shins & insteps) are far from his base (hips)



Fig. b - By moving his hips (base) closer to his shins (power-point), he amplifies his leverage

You can watch a video of me demonstrating this here:

<http://tinyurl.com/qzmkkkq>

Eye & Head Movement

"Where the head goes the body follows."- Wrestling Maxim

This is principle from wrestling and one of the first concepts I learned in grappling. The head is attached to the top of the spinal column, and can therefore be used as a lever to 'steer' the entire torso and body of an opponent in a certain direction, or stop his movement in another.

By twisting his head you cause your opponent great discomfort, and severely compromise the mobility of his spine. Also, as the head is the centre of a person's physical awareness because it contains the brain and many of the major sense organs, it is very easy to distract and upset the rhythm of an opponent by interfering with it.



Black nullifies the takedown by redirecting white's head using the cross-face

Where you look is where you go

I used the principle of controlling the head successfully in my training for many years, but

a couple of years ago I had a realisation which gave me a much deeper understanding of it.

In addition to using this principle to control your opponent by forcing his head in a specific direction, you can also use it to improve the power and efficiency of many of your movements.

It is even better to think about the direction of your gaze instead of focusing on the direction of your head movement. If you understand that where you look is where your head goes and where your body follows, it will facilitate a great number of jiu jitsu movements.

Before you initiate any movement, simply start by looking in the direction you want to go or apply power towards.

An excellent example of this is the bridge. By looking in the direction of your bridge you get far more extension through your hips and thus are able to generate more power.

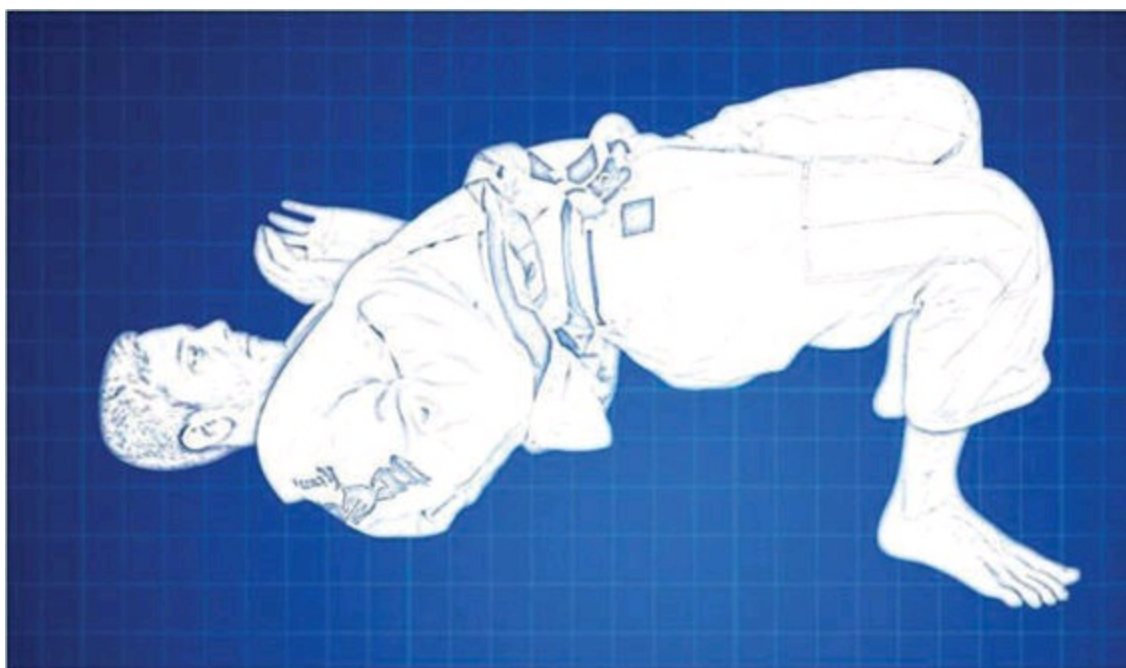


Fig a - this is a good bridge but the movement's potential is not fully realised

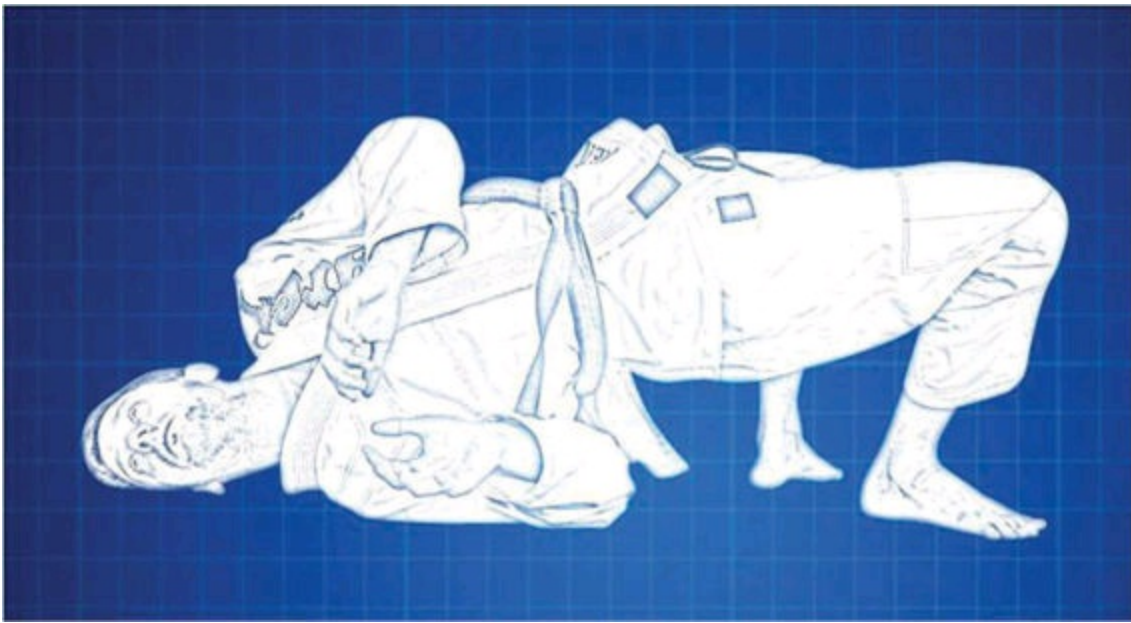


Fig. b - by looking over his shoulder the bridge is extended and improved

You can watch a video describing head and eye movement in more in more detail here:

<http://tinyurl.com/mqqywbw>

How to Attack Joints Effectively

Generally, in order to apply joint locks in jiu jitsu effectively, you need to follow this principle:

When attacking a joint, it's important that you control both the joint directly above (proximal) and directly below (distal) it. This completely immobilizes the compromised joint and allows the applied leverage to be transferred more directly against it. If you fail to do this, your opponent may be able to escape by rotating around the axis of the joint.

A prime example of this principle is the straight arm-lock or juji-gatame. When attempting this technique, the joint that is being attacked is the elbow. The joint directly above the elbow (proximal to the centre of the body) is the shoulder, and the joint directly below it (distal to the centre of the body) is the wrist.

This is why when you learned the juji-gatame you were told to pinch your opponent's shoulder between your legs and control his wrist by making sure his thumb was pointing to the ceiling. A violation of these two details of the technique often results in an ineffective joint-lock which allows the opponent to attempt an escape. It is sometimes sufficient to control just the joint directly above the attacked joint, but much more effective to control both adjacent joints simultaneously.

Below are some visual examples:



Fig a - effective Joint attack: Black is attacking the ankle of white via an arm-lock. Notice how he controls both the joint above (shoulder squeezed between legs) and below (wrist pinned to chest) the one he is attacking.

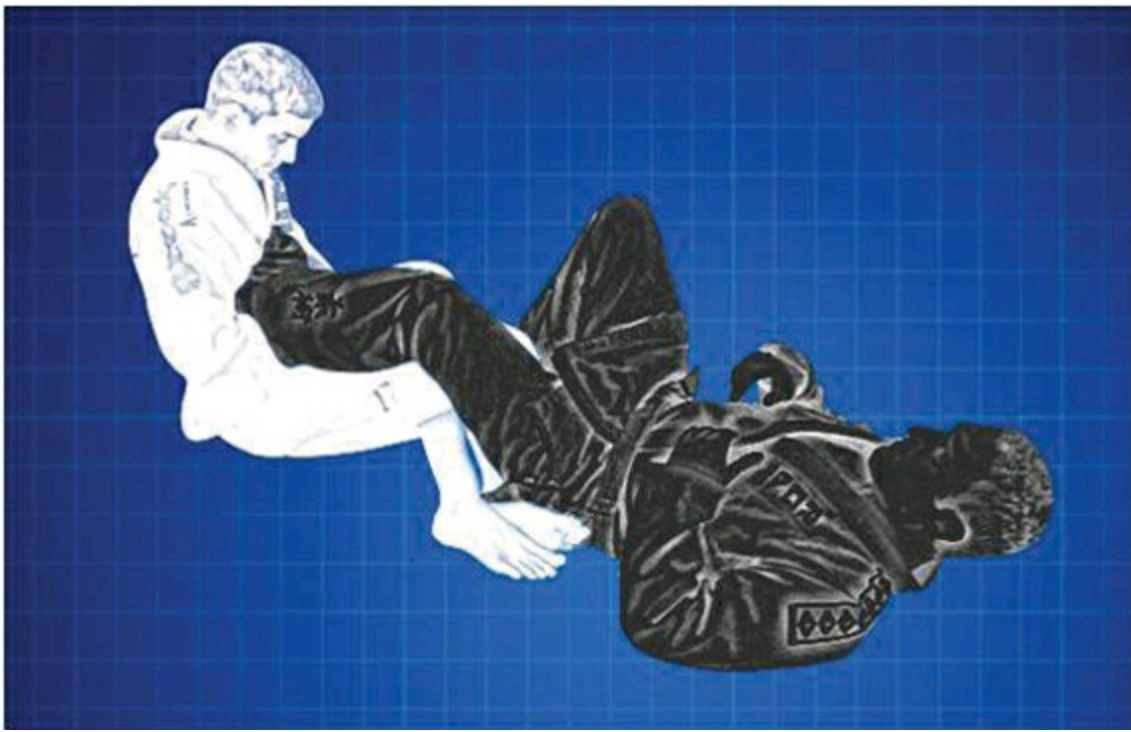


Fig b - ineffective Joint attack: white is attempting to attack black's foot/ankle with the achilles-tendon hold. Notice how he has no control of joint above, which is white's knee.

Try this out for yourself. Next time you are attempting a joint-lock submission on an opponent and it is not working properly, ask yourself "Am I controlling the joints both above and below?". I think you will be surprised at what you observe.

The B.O.S.S. Principle

The B.O.S.S. Principle was introduced to me a couple of years ago by my good friend and fellow black-belt Adam Shahir Kayoom who runs the Q23 academy in Bangkok, Thailand.

This really simple concept will help both beginner and advanced students, and once you have internalized it you'll notice dramatic improvements in both your top and bottom games.

What is the B.O.S.S. Concept?

B.O.S.S. stands for "Back OR Side & Shoulder". To put it as simply as possible, it states the following:

1. When controlling your opponent from the top, try to put his back flat on the mat.
2. When being controlled on the bottom, make sure you're on your side and have one of your shoulders off the mat.

Why is it important?

One of the objectives in many grappling styles is to 'pin' both shoulders of your opponent on the mat. The reason this is desirable is because it is a good demonstration of control.

In jiu-jitsu, even though our objective is always submission, we can use the pin to control our opponent before moving on to our finishes. This is why many wrestlers pick up jiu-jitsu really quickly.

From a defensive perspective, when both of your shoulders/back is pinned to the mat you will find it very difficult to generate the leverage and create the angles required to escape.

Where do we use this principle?

B.O.S.S is most effective in the Half-Guard, Side mount and Mount, from both the top and bottom positions.

Examples of the principle in Action:

Example 1 - Half Guard

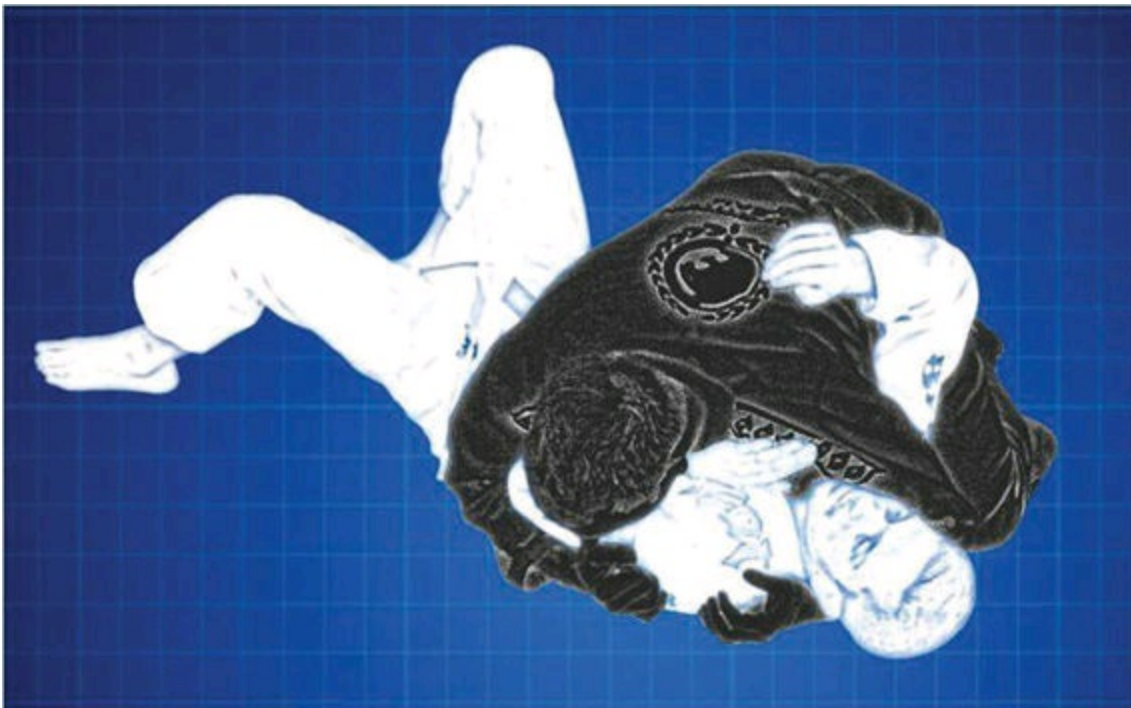


Fig. a - white is being controlled in side control. he knows to get leverage he needs to get to his side and get one shoulder off the floor.



Fig. b - he releases the pressure from his neck and changes the angle between his torso and the floor. Now he is in a better position to defend as he has created leverage.

Example 2 - Mount



Fig. a - Black is on his side and has one of his shoulders off the floor, and as a result has the leverage he needs to start his elbow-knee escape.



Fig. b - white counters by pushing his opponents head to the opposite side and forcing both of his shoulders to the mat, re-establishing control

Other Tips

- When on top, It's usually easier and more effective to pin the shoulders to mat using your bodyweight, not the strength of your arms.
- When on the bottom, it'll be really hard to get to your side and get one shoulder off the ground if your opponent is controlling your head / jaw. Work on freeing it first.

Note: One of the few places this doesn't work is in closed guard.

You can see a video of me demonstrating part of this concept here:

<http://tinyurl.com/o7xdxy7>

PART 4

On the Mat

“Practise, practise and all Is coming” - K. Pattabhi Jois

The Importance of Repetition

"I fear not the man who has practiced 10,000 kicks once, but I fear the man who has practiced one kick 10,000 times." - Bruce Lee

In most BJJ and grappling academies the average student repeats each technique he is shown perhaps 10-20 times directly after the instructor's demonstration of it. This is woefully inadequate.

Several years ago a large, international company conducted a multi-million dollar study on adult learning. One of their findings was that children and adults learn in two completely different manners. While children learn by doing, adults learn by repeating.

Unfortunately, unlike the Gracies and the Machados, very few of us were grappling in our diapers. If you only began training in your late teens or as an adult, in order to make rapid progress it will be greatly beneficial if you adopt the habit of practicing movements by using memorization through repetition, also referred to as rote learning.

Very often while sparring or, more importantly competing, you will not have time to think about a movement before you perform it. In these cases, if your body cannot perform the required movement reflexively your window of opportunity will close. A movement is said to be reflexive when it involves the body reacting to a stimulus while bypassing cognitive thought.

Some studies have shown that for a physical movement to become a reflex it needs to be repeated at least 500 times, while other studies put the figure at 5000 repetitions. Either way, can you honestly say that you have practiced your straight arm-bar from the guard, or any other move for that matter, anywhere near that much? If the answer is no, don't be despondent, just think of the room you have for improvement.

In Japan the repetition-based approach is the cornerstone of most martial arts training (e.g. uchikomi in Judo). Many attribute the decades-long Japanese dominance of Judo and their rapid uptake of Brazilian jiu-jitsu to their regimented approach to training, the cornerstone of which is consistent, daily repetition.

I tell my students to repeat a technique until they are sick of it - and then to practise it some more. Boredom is a sign of mastery. It takes patience and self-discipline to do this, but the reward of performing an attack or counter effortlessly and reflexively during sparring is well worth it.

In the next chapter I will show you an effective way to repeat your techniques so as to maximize your retention of them.

Memorize Techniques Efficiently

"Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn."
- Benjamin Franklin

During your jiu jitsu career you will be exposed to hundreds, if not thousands of techniques. However, only a fraction of these will become 'yours' - internalised to the point where you can do them reflexively and can use them repeatedly against resisting opponents.

Keep this in mind: there is no short-cut to remembering techniques. As mentioned earlier, it's estimated that it takes between 500-5000 repetitions of a movement to make it a reflex. Below I have outlined an efficient method of drilling which, when followed, make the number of times you need to practise a jiu-jitsu move much closer to 500 than 5000.

Committing even a single complex technique to memory is of great benefit for beginner students. I can't explain the neuroscience behind it, but it's been my experience that once they have done this comprehensively for at least one move, learning all subsequent moves becomes easier. It's almost as if you permanently 'unlock' the ability once you have done it comprehensively once.

1. Find a technique combination and watch it

Select a sequence of techniques that combine well together (e.g. the kimura, hip-bump sweep and guillotine choke chain from closed guard) and watch a demonstration of it several times. The quality of your source is important because you don't want to spend time reinforcing bad technique. Most jiu jitsu teachers teach techniques using combinations, so pay attention in class. You can also find many such examples on YouTube.



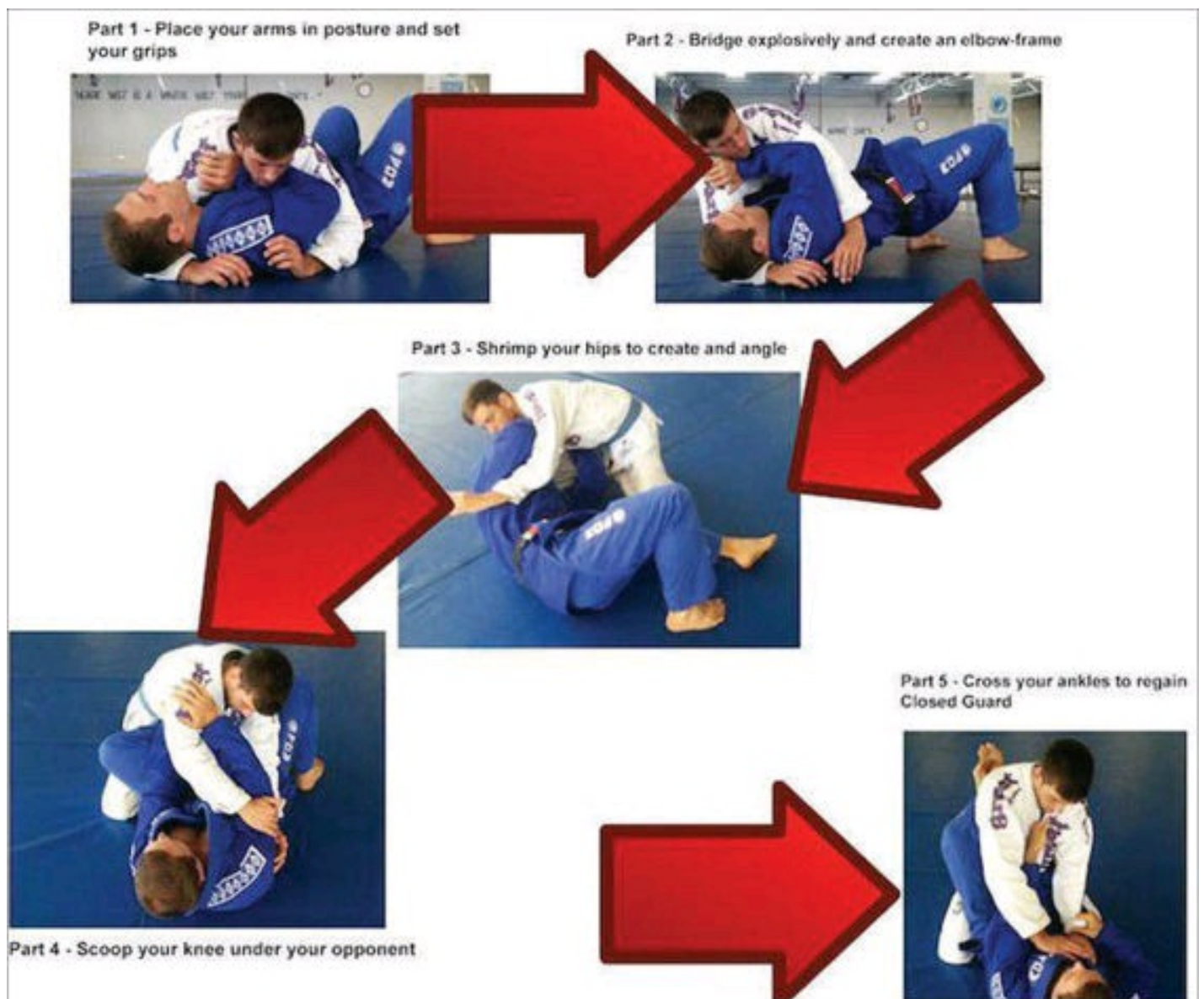
The hip-Bump, kimura, Guillotine is an example of a combination

2. Name the sequence and the techniques within it

Giving something a name greatly increases the likelihood that you will remember it. This is one of the reasons why Eddie Bravo's 10th Planet jiu jitsu system is so easy to remember - everything in it has been classified. It doesn't matter where the name comes from, as long as it's something that you can easily remember. Usually the first thing that pops into your mind is the one you're most likely to remember.

3. Break the first technique down into parts

Most BJJ techniques can be broken down into 3-4 parts. Here is an example:



Even a simple technique such as the guard- replacement can be broken down into several parts

4. Practise each part slowly several times (without resistance)

5. Talk yourself through the full technique as you repeat it several times (without resistance)

Put all the parts together and practise it until you can do it reasonably fluidly. I find it beneficial to literally talk myself through this part of the process i.e. "First I get my arms in posture" etc.

6. Practise the technique several times with your eyes closed (without resistance)

7. Practise the technique several times (with resistance)

Now have your opponent resist lightly (no more than 20-30 percent). This step is important and often-overlooked in most academies. Techniques are not used in a vacuum, and so this is necessary to simulate the real-world scenario of sparring.

8. Repeat steps 3-7 with the second and third techniques

9. Perform the full combination several times (without resistance)

10. Repeat the full combination several times (with resistance)

Using this method, you will experience the technique in both the visual (by watching it), auditory (by saying it aloud) and kinaesthetic (by doing it with your eyes closed) learning modalities. You will also get many repetitions in, and repetition is the mother of all skill.

Fundamental Movements

Flavio Canto, Judo Olympian once said 'Practise movements, not only moves.' I now understand his reasoning. Movements are versatile and can be woven into techniques. They represent a powerful leverage point because practising them gives a massive return in jiu jitsu ability.

I once heard an interesting analogy, which likened grappling to a language, and a sparring match to a conversation. If grappling is a language, then there are certain essential movements which could be considered the vowels - they are that important.

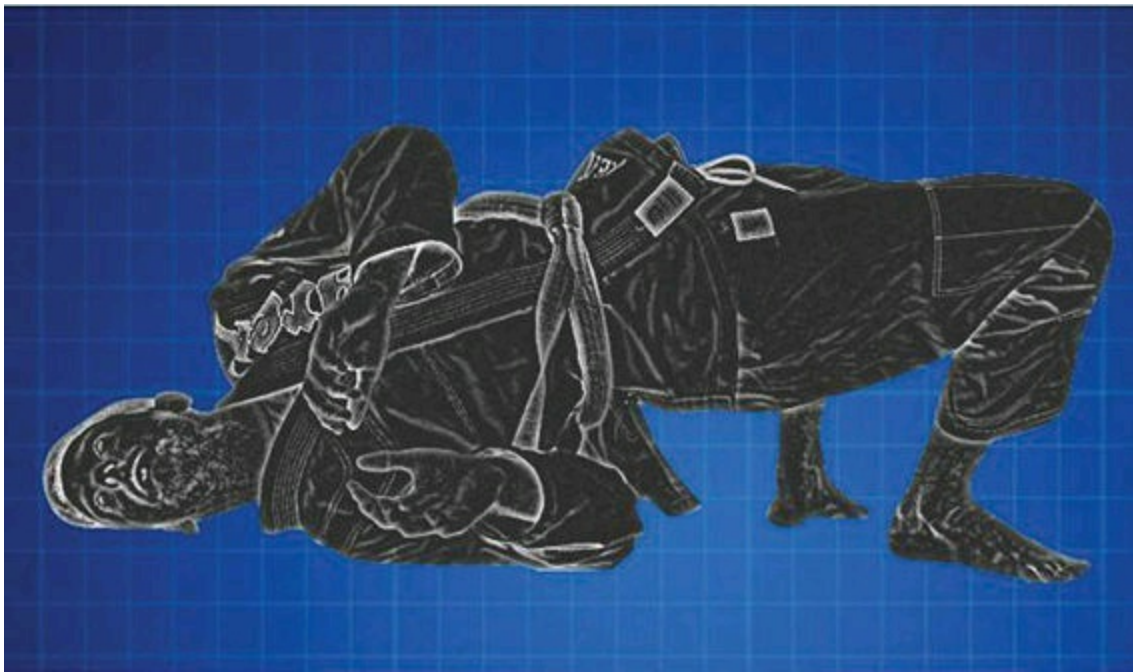
If you attend a formal BJJ class, it's highly likely that you will perform these movements as part of the warm up. I frequently see many students not putting any effort into performing them properly, either because of boredom or laziness. This is a mistake. These movements form the foundation of your physical jiu jitsu game and are vitally important. You should practise them as often as possible and try to improve your form each time.

The best fighters have practised these movements to reflexive proficiency. This means that in the right context, their bodies will perform them without the need for conscious thought.

Although there are dozens of important jiu jitsu movements, I have identified the 5 which I feel are the most important.

1. Bridging

Bridging is one of the two foundational movements of Brazilian jiu jitsu. It teaches you to generate power using the large gluteal muscles. The higher and more explosively you can bridge, the harder it will be for somebody to hold you down in any position.



The more powerful your bridge the better your escapes will be

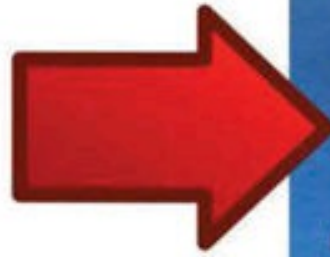
Key tips for bridging:

- Drive through your heels
- Look over your shoulder
- Keep your hips square to the ceiling
- Practising the bridge with one foot off the floor is a good progression

2. Shrimping



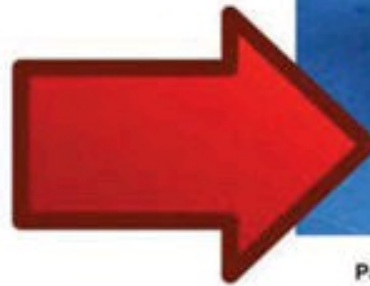
Part 1 - Square your hips



Part 2 - Elevate your hips with a bridge



Part 4 - Create an angle by pushing your butt back



Part 4 - Finish by going to your knees

The importance of a strong shrimp movement cannot be overstated

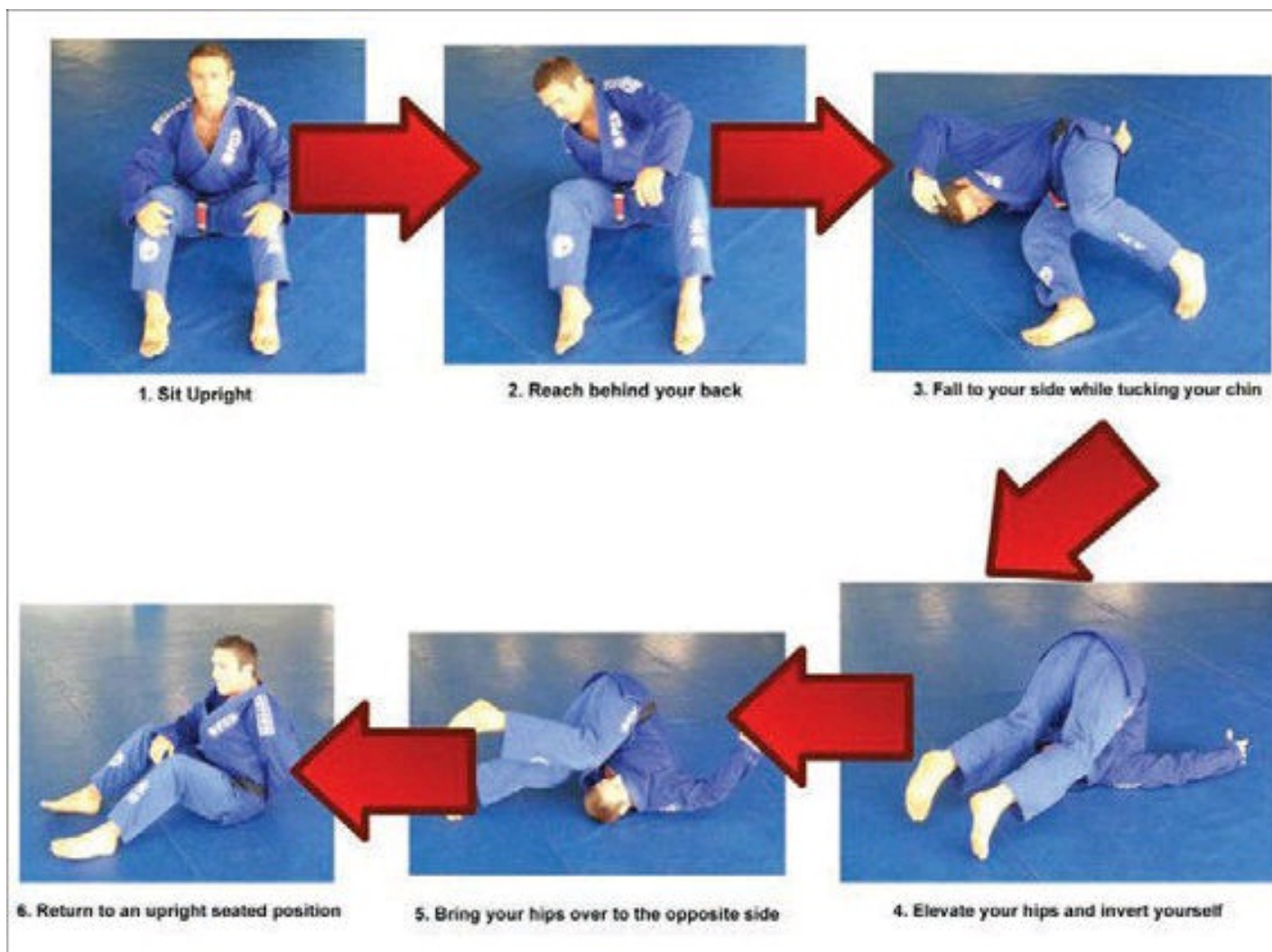
Shrimping (sometimes called 'snaking') is equally as important as bridging. It forms the foundation of pretty much every defensive technique. I have a saying that I tell my beginner students: "When in doubt, shrimp."

The reason it is so powerful is that it teaches you to use your hips (instead of your arms) to initiate your movement and forces you to create an angle change with your spine. Make sure you practise the 'shrimp to knees' variation once you have mastered the basic version.

Key tips for shrimping:

- Exhale as you perform the movement
- Try to create a full 90 degree angle between your start and finish positions
- Contract your abdominals hard as you perform the movement

3. Shoulder roll / Granby roll



The shoulder roll is a vital defensive movement. Not only will it make your guard far more difficult to pass, it will also help keep your neck safe when you are stacked from your guard. As you progress further in your training you will discover more and more applications for this versatile movement.

Key tips for the Shoulder Roll:

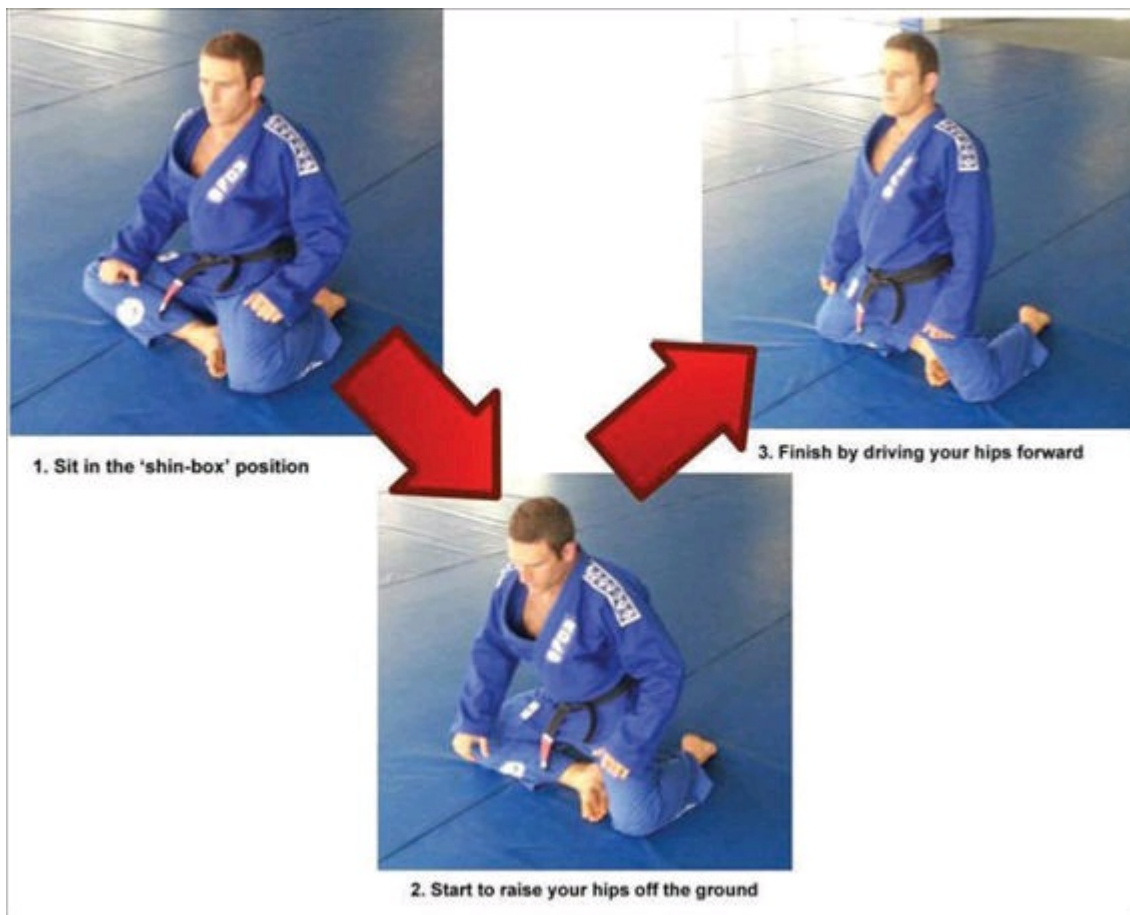
- Exhale as you perform the movement
- Tuck your chin to your chest

4. Hip projector

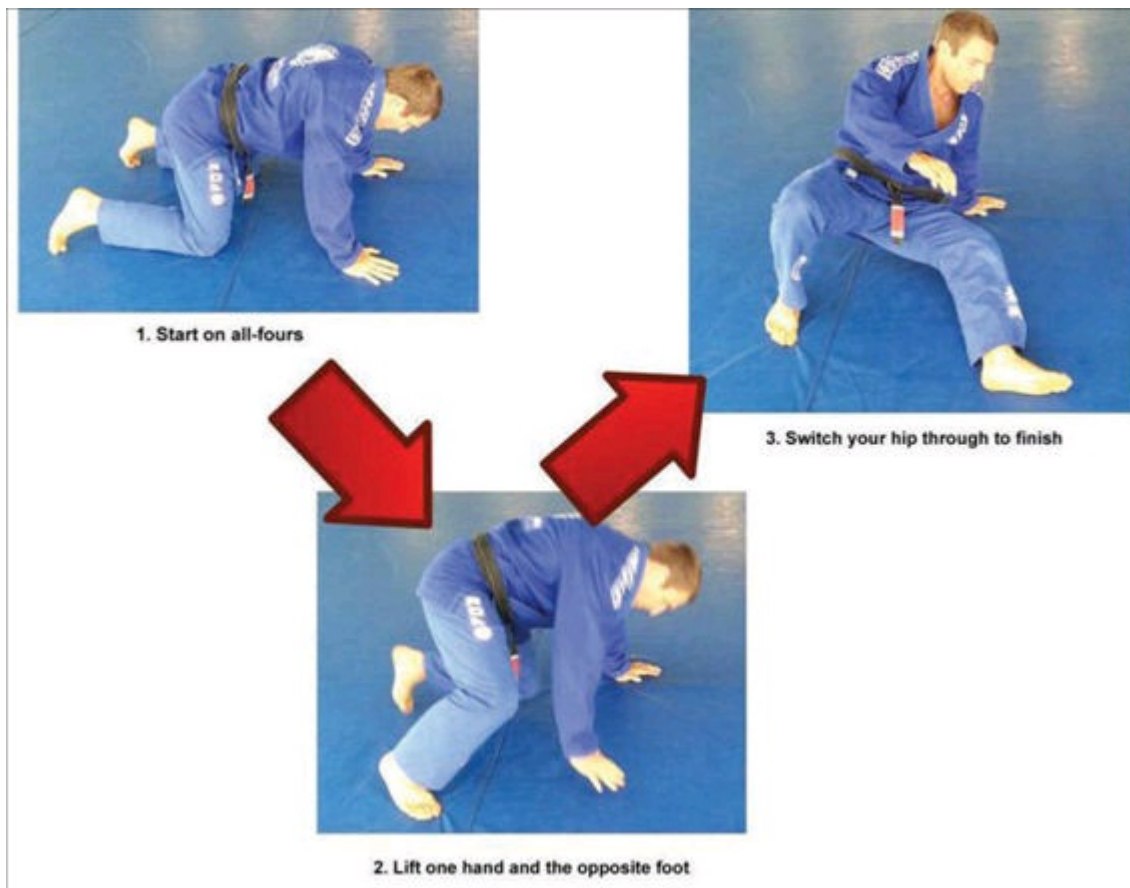
This movement teaches you to engage or 'chase' opponents with your hips when you are on top. It is also an invaluable movement pattern to be able to do reflexively when you are in a scramble. This is because using your bottom center (hips) to shut down and opponent's is far more effective than using the upper body and top center (arms and chest), which is the more instinctive reaction.

Key tips for the Hip Projector:

- Work on the flexibility of your hip-flexors - if they are tight they will limit you in this movement



5. 45 degree sit-out



This movement is derived from wrestling and teaches you to create angles using hip movement. It plays an important role in both recovering from failed take-down attempts

and also for being able to create options when you are being attacked in the turtle position.

Key tips for the 45 degree sit-out:

- reach your extending leg as far as possible
- throw your elbow and head back explosively to increase power

I want to re-iterate that just because you do these drills a few times each during the warm up in class does not mean you are doing them correctly or to anywhere near their potential. I've been training for almost 12 years and I'm still refining and improving all of them. Keep in mind that there are several variations on each of them. Spend time researching and practising them and I guarantee you'll see improvements quickly.

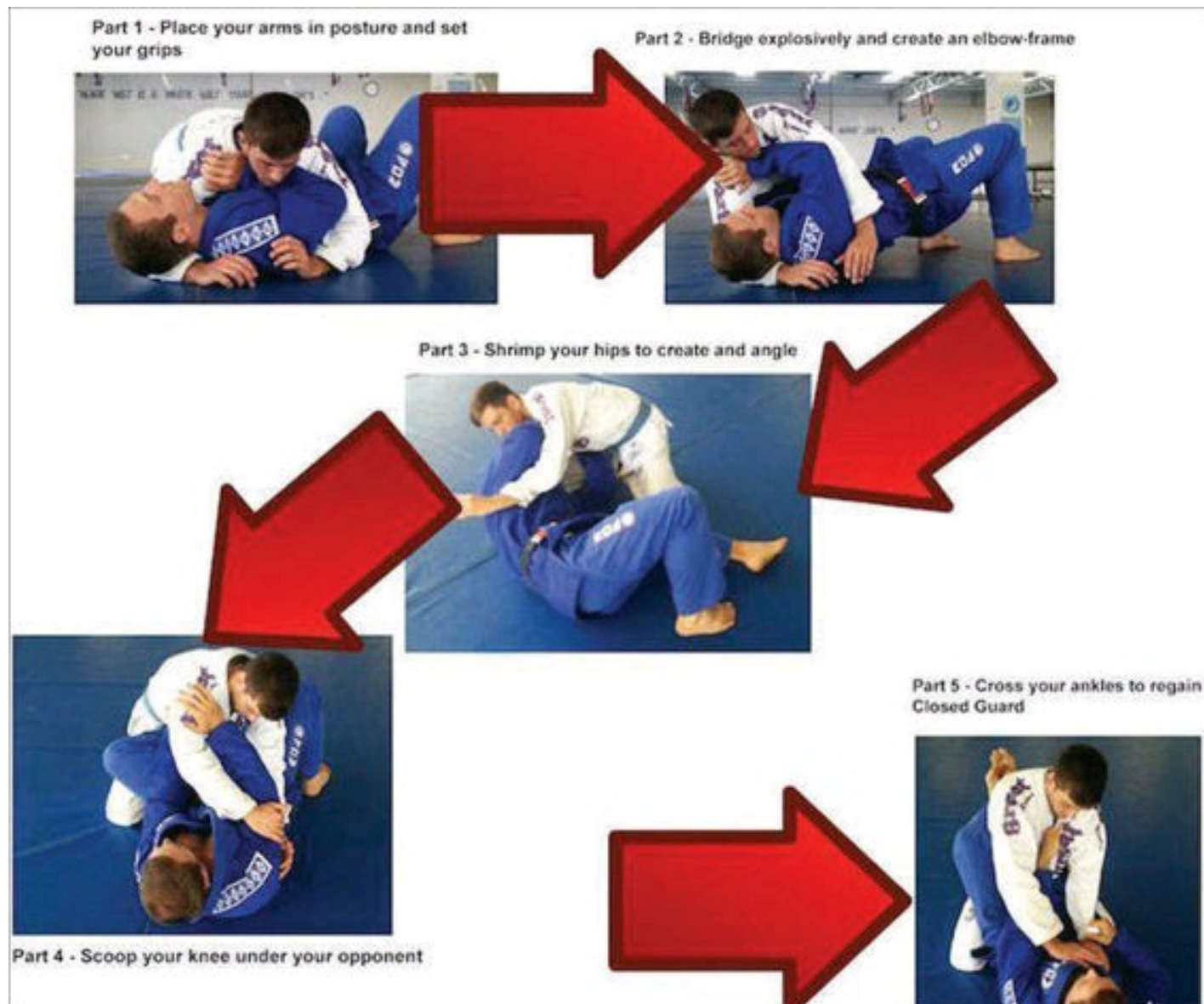
I have also developed a training method called 'Grapple Kata' which incorporates several of these movements. You can watch a demonstration of it here:

<http://tinyurl.com/covtamv>

Essential Defensive Techniques

As I mention in other parts of this book, it's essential to build your game from a solid defense. Here are 5 defensive techniques which you should be able to perform reflexively - this means you shouldn't even have to think about them when you do them.

1. Bridge and Shrimp to Guard Replacement



The Bridge and shrimp Guard replacement is the most important defensive technique

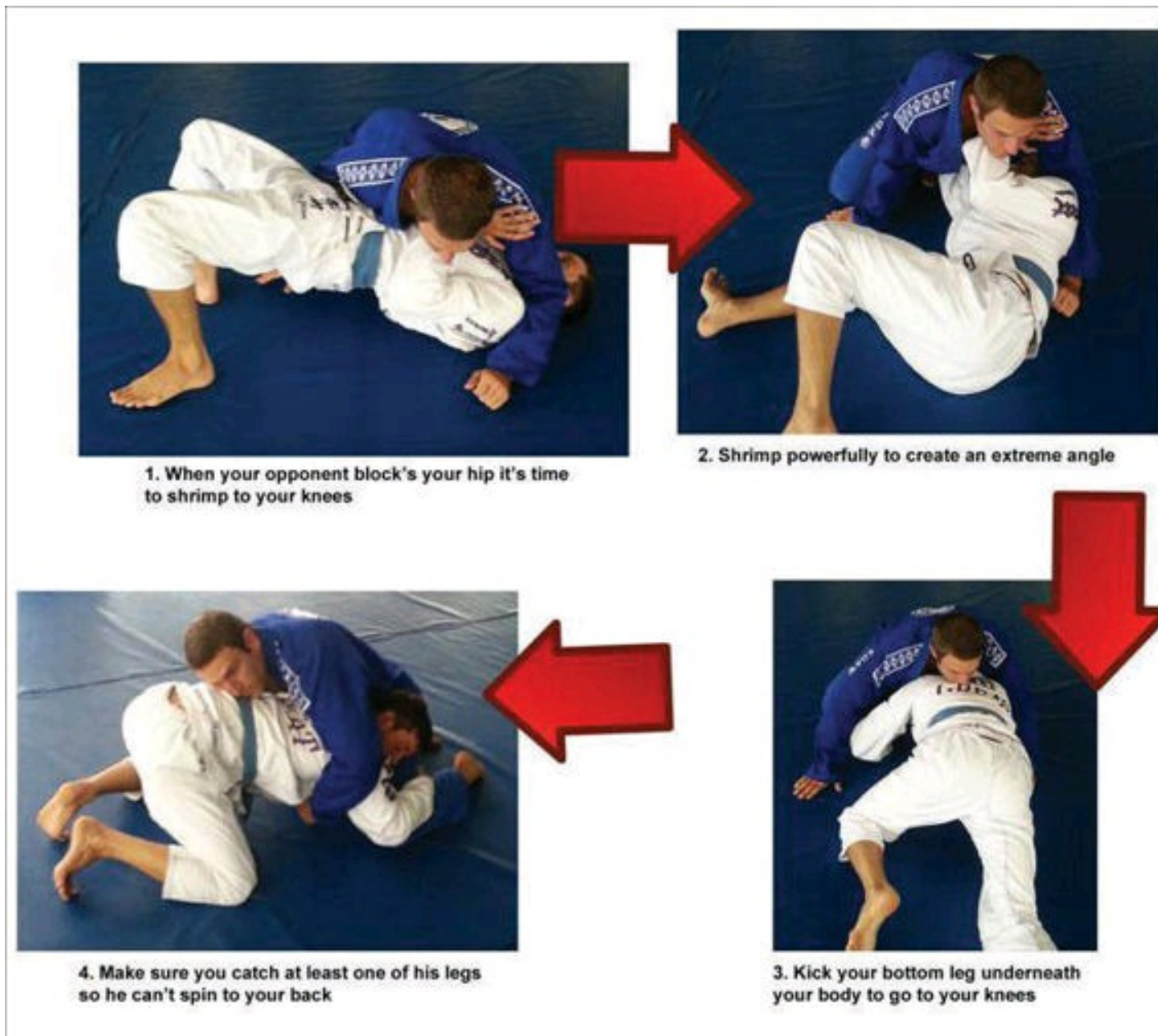
This is the king of all defensive techniques. It is the first ground technique I teach any beginner, and the move I still use more than any other after almost 14 years on the mat. It is often used in combination with the 'Getting to Knees Side Mount Escape' detailed below.

2. Getting to the Knees Side Mount Escape

This is usually used in the side-mount when the attacker is blocking your hip, but being able to go back to your knees safely is something you'll use over and over in many different scenarios.

The most important thing about this technique is to focus on creating a big enough angle by moving your hips far enough.

Notice how this technique is basically a combination of two of the essential movements listed in the previous chapter (the Bridge and the Shrimp)

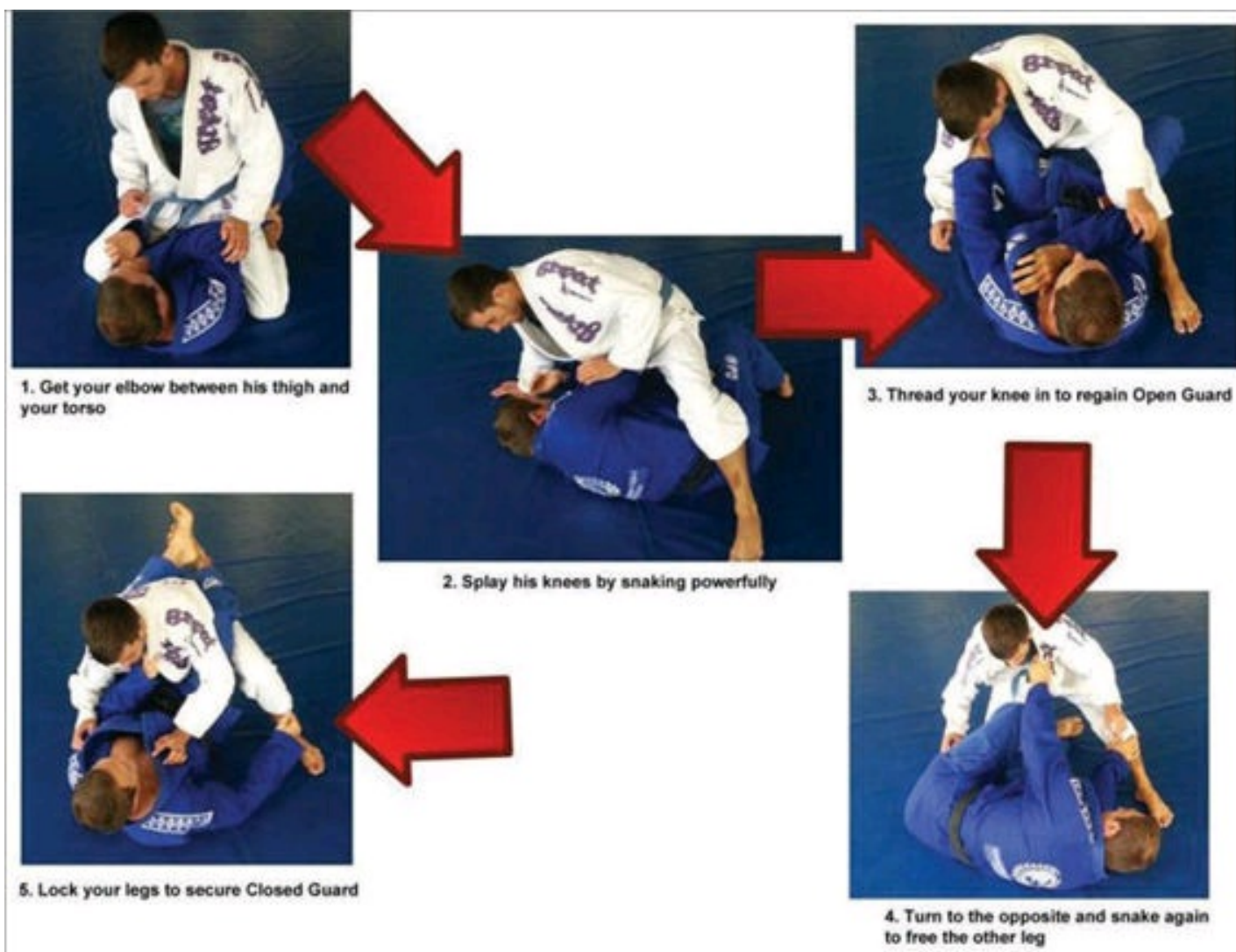


3. Elbow-to-Knee Mount Escape

I often tell my students "Jiu Jitsu can be summed up as: A Game of Hips and Elbows". You are usually either controlling either your opponent's hips or elbows, or using your own hips and elbows to create a base and generate leverage. So often it will be a case of your elbow versus his hip, or your hip versus his elbow. Nowhere is this maxim better illustrated than with the vital elbow-to-knee escape.

You can see a demonstration of this technique and a detailed explanation of the 'hips and elbows' concept in action in this video:

<http://tinyurl.com/q3c22xn>



4. The standing guard pass

In my opinion, passing the guard is by far the most difficult aspect of BJJ. If a guy has strong legs and active hips, dealing with his guard can be absolute hell.

The standing guard pass should really be called 'the standing guard break', because most of the time you're only standing for the first part, which is 'breaking' open of his guard where his legs cross on your lower back.

Once his legs are open, you can proceed to pass the guard from a standing or kneeling position. But either way, to open the guard of an decent jiu jitsuka who matches you in size and strength, you will invariably have to stand up.

Here are several overlooked key details.

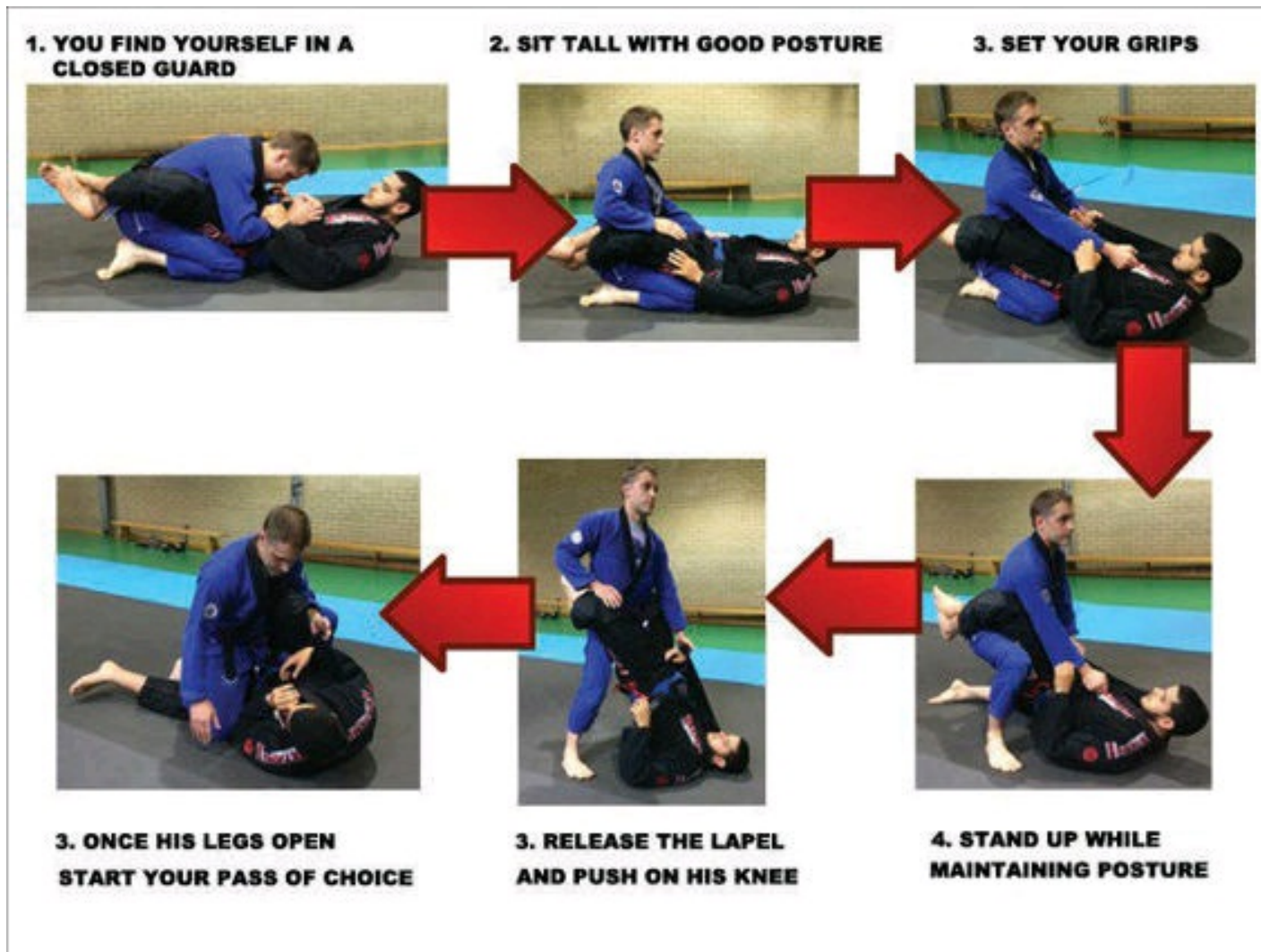
1. Do not stand until your posture is good.

Standing with poor posture guarantees that this technique will fail.

2. Set your grips first. You will need BOTH grips engaged correctly before you stand.

3. Once you are standing, do not tilt your head forwards.

This will compromise your posture and allow your opponent to pull you back to the mat before you have uncrossed his ankles.



5. Classic Back Escape

Escaping from the back can be incredibly difficult and the best advice is to not let yourself get caught in this position. But when it invariably happens, you better have a couple of high-percentage options of getting out. Although there are probably fancier techniques for getting out of the back mount, this one is the most important of them all. It combines many essential movements (bridge, shrimp) and concepts (rule of angles, dominating the centre) to create a highly effective escape.



1. Protect your neck and get your balance



2. Bridge into your opponent



4. Thread your bottom leg underneath and complete the angle change to Side Mount



3. Hold his knee tightly and snake your hips to prise apart his hooks

Essential Attacks

Attacking movements in jiu jitsu include submissions, sweeps and guard passes. Submissions can also be subdivided into:

- Chokes (attacks on the trachea, or wind-pipe)
- Strangles (attacks on the carotid arteries)
- Joint locks (hyperextension of joints)
- Compressions/Crushes (painful attacks on soft tissue - usually muscles)
- Cranks (painful manipulations of the spine, usually the cervical or lumbar vertebrae)

Here are six, high-percentage attacks that can be used to form a solid foundation for your attacking jiu-jitsu.

1. Straight arm-lock from the guard

This is the first submission I teach my private students. Although in application it appears simple, it's actually a complex technique with many points to it.



Mastering the straight arm-lock will give you insight into many jiu jitsu principles

Understanding the straight arm-lock from guard also imbues the jiu jitsuka with insight into several key grappling concepts including grip control, head control, creation of angles of, and the use of the hips, core and glutes drive to apply leverage.

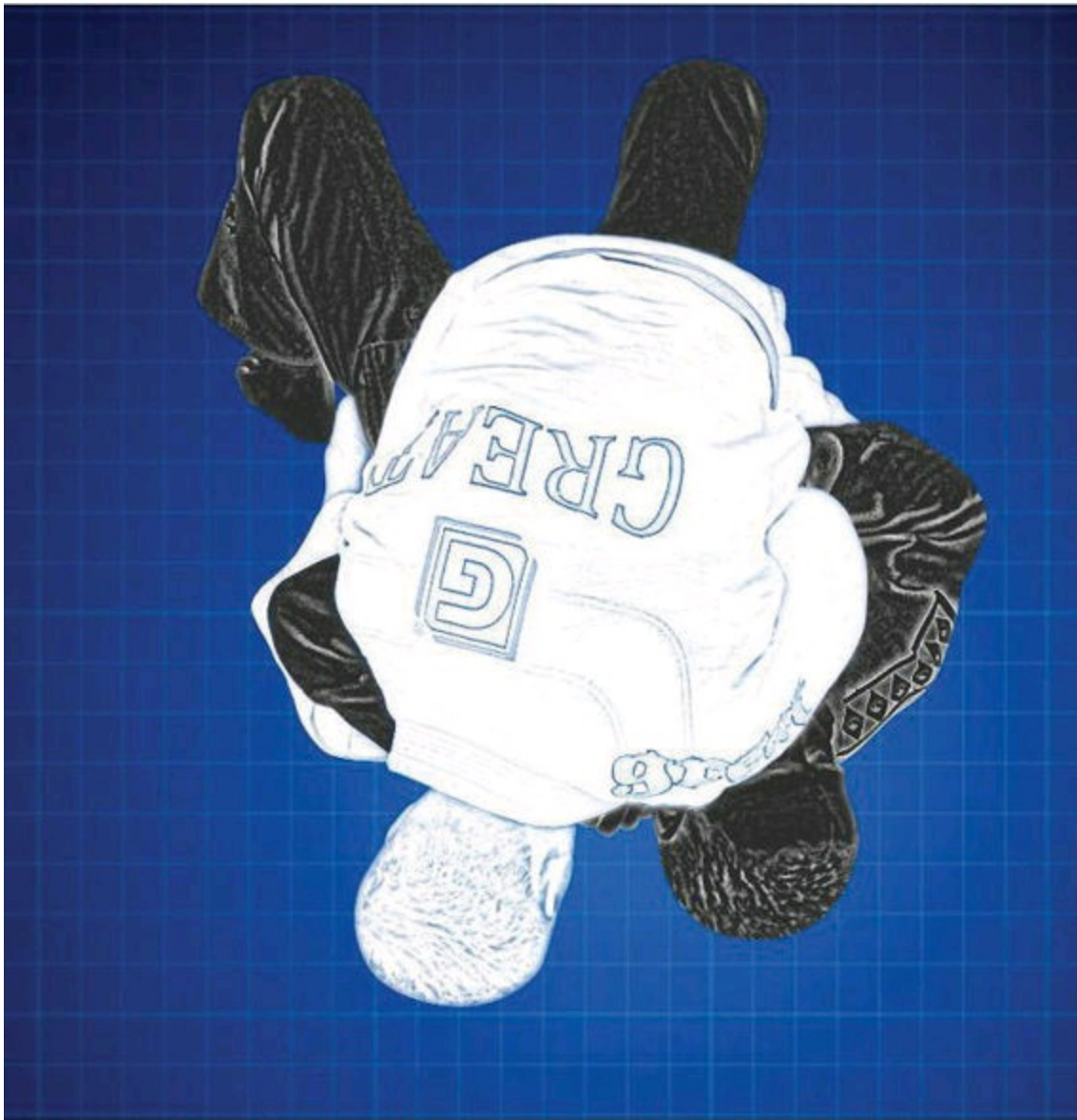
If you want to see me demonstrate this technique online you can find the video here:

<http://tinyurl.com/c2gpd7f>

2. Cross-Choke from Mount

This is actually a strangle but commonly referred to as a choke (remember the difference?) It is one of the highest-percentage submissions in the game, and there's a reason why it's the finish of choice of the best jiu jitsu competitor of all-time, Roger Gracie. The cross-choke requires balance and patience, as well as a strong grip (which we will cover more in detail later).

Here's a video of me explaining this technique in detail.



Once you understand the mechanics of the cross-choke you will finish many opponents with it

3. Scissor Sweep

I once heard that Rickson considers the scissor sweep the most important of all the sweeps. If this is true I can understand why. Understanding it is paramount because to do it properly you have to incorporate several principles that are vital to most sweeps.

Control of the wrist and arm of the side you are sweeping to.

If you don't do this, you'll never complete the sweep in a million years. Overlooking this one detail is the main contributing factor to failed sweeps in my opinion.

Powering this sweep using the hips and trunk as opposed to the arms.

Most of the time, if you're using your arms to power a movement you're operating inefficiently. Watch how beginner's will try to move their opponents using arm strength

almost exclusively when doing this. With the scissor sweep the kicking of the legs provides the power and momentum required to successfully perform it.

Facilitating the inversion by raising your opponents center of gravity.

With good scissor-sweeping technique, you use the top leg and lapel-grip to elevate your partner's hips by pulling him towards you. This raises his center of gravity (pelvis) and makes it far easier to flip him over. This is a common element in most sweeps and reversals.

For more information on the scissor sweep check out one of the hundreds of youtube instructionals available - try to identify the principles above while you're watching them.



Learning the scissor sweep gives understanding of many jiu jitsu concepts

4. Bow and Arrow choke

Technically this is a strangle not a choke (remember the difference?). Although the rear naked choke or 'sleeper hold' is still considered by many to be the best of all attacks from the back position, in my opinion the bow and arrow choke is far superior. The reason for this is that it employs the creation of an angle to hugely increase the available leverage.



The extreme angle granted by the bow and arrow choke makes it superior to the classic lapel choke

5. The Triangle

In my opinion, this is the ultimate submission. No other attack represents the beauty of the art as much as the triangle does. It is the ultimate expression of leverage and control and it is incredibly versatile. There are multiple triangle variations available from almost all of the control positions.

My first coach said to me "When you have the triangle on properly, the only way your opponent is getting out is when you let him" and I now understand what he meant by this.

Although the triangle is incredibly effective, unfortunately it is very often taught incorrectly. The three most important points to remember are to:

1. Pull your opponent's head down
2. Contract towards the center with 'crunch' movement (do not expand by arching your hips.)
3. Make sure that the shin of the wrapping leg is perpendicular to your opponent's neck.



The triangle represents the pinnacle of jiu-jitsu submissions

Understanding the Grip

Before I started jiu jitsu, I was already a pretty strong guy. I worked out with weights and played a lot of sport. After my first sparring match in a Gi I was shocked to see how weak my hands and fingers were, and how taxing the sport was on those parts of my body. Over the years as I continued training, I learned just how important it was to have a strong grip.

I remember one of my early instructors, Felipe Souza, saying “In jiu jitsu if your grip goes you can’t fight”. Later, during a competition, I saw just how true his words were. After my 2nd match my forearms fatigued and I was unable to hold on to my adversary in the semi-final and subsequently lost the match. I promised myself then that I’d do everything I could to improve my grip. This is what I learned:

1. Set Your Grips Before you Move

When training in a Gi, the importance of this cannot be overestimated. As a general rule, do not move before you have engaged at least one grip. This is why you see judoka’s fighting so violently for grip control. They know that the first person to grip is at a huge advantage. It’s the same in jiu jitsu. When you have the dominant grips, you are one step ahead of your opponent.

2. Grip in the Correct Place

Where to grip is of vital importance. You may have the strongest, most efficient gripping technique in the world, but if you’re gripping the wrong things you’ll struggle to generate the requisite amount of leverage required to achieve your objectives.

As a general rule, you should grip as close to joints as possible. It is much easier to manipulate your opponent’s body by pushing or pulling against his joints.



Fig. a - poor grip - holding between joints (wrist and elbow)



Fig. b - Better grip - holding close to a joint (wrist)

3. Strengthen Your Hands and Fingers

Your fingers and hands will naturally become stronger after a couple of years of training, but if you want to turbo charge the process, you will need to seek out supplemental training. There are countless grip-strengthening gadgets and courses on the market, each of which I'm sure has some value. Do your research. For me, the thing that helped most in developing my grip was rock climbing - nothing else even came close. Going to an indoor-climbing center once per week for a year made all the difference. Try it out and you'll see a big improvement.

4. Grip Efficiently

No matter how strong your grip is, if you're holding onto the cloth using too much strength, your forearms will eventually fatigue and your grip will weaken. When you grip incorrectly you start a chain reaction of excess tension in your body that travels up the forearm, the upper arm and into the muscles of the back and shoulders. This greatly increases the rate at which you fatigue and is a waste of energy.

Let your fingers do the work

A smarter way to grip is to let your fingers do the work, by using them as 'hooks' and actively trying to relax the muscles of your arms. This skill takes a bit of practise, but the sooner you master it the better.



Using the 'hook' grip is very energy efficient

5. Grip correctly for Chokes and Strangles

A large percentage of submissions in BJJ come from strangles and chokes using our opponent's Gi against them. Whether or not you will be effective at these finishing moves is largely dependent on the quality of the grip you use to apply them. Here are two aspects to gripping in this context which are important:

Hand-Wrist Alignment

Just as if you were punching a bag or an opponent, you want your hand and wrist to form a straight line. If they do not your grip will be inefficient and weak.



Fig. a - poor wrist-hand alignment Fig. b - Good wrist-hand alignment

Wrist Position

Think of your wrists as knives that are cutting into your opponent's neck. You want to have the sharp edge of the blade against his skin, not the broad, flat surface. You make sure this happens by turning your wrist so that either the radial or ulnar bones of the wrist are in contact with your opponent.

You can see some more detailed tips on gripping in this video:

<http://tinyurl.com/m76zvam>



Fig. a - this grip is weak because the hand is not aligned with the wrist



Fig. b - this grip is stronger because of the correct hand-wrist alignment

Training for Competitions

There's an expression: "How you train is how you fight."

Chilled-out, 'flow' rolling is much easier on your body and a good strategy for a healthy, long career on the mat, but if your goal is to become a competitor it's not enough.

Competition generally requires a much faster, tighter and more explosive game. In addition there is far less margin for error, because many jiu jitsu players like to stall once they have achieved a dominant position. This means you will have to adjust your training accordingly. Weaving these three principles into your competition training program will pay great dividends.

Ask how would you would beat yourself

As human beings, we naturally gravitate towards things we are good at, and avoid things we are poor at. To become a great competitor, you will have to override this inclination and move towards your weak areas instead of away from them. This will require a honest assessment of your game.

You could ask your instructor or training partners for their opinion on what you need to work on, but at the end of the day, YOU know what you need to be doing to improve.

A question I often ask my students is "If you were fighting a clone of yourself, what would your strategy be? What part of his game would you be concerned about? Which part would be of no threat to you?"

This, along with sparring, is the quickest way to reveal your weaknesses and the holes in your game. For example, I know my half-guard attacks on the bottom are weak, and so training them offers large scope for improvement.

The 80-20 Rule

Vilfredo Pareto was a 16th century Italian economist who made several interesting discoveries which led the formulation of his law, the Pareto Principle, which states that in any endeavour, 80% of the result is derived from 20% of the effort.

Most of the grappling arts consist of hundreds upon hundreds of attacks, defences and counters. However, during the practical applications of sparring and competition, only a small selection of these techniques is employed successfully and, more importantly, consistently. These are what grapplers are referring to when they speak of 'high percentage' and 'low percentage' moves.

Think back to the last grappling tournament you were at – more likely than not there was a very limited selection of finishing/scoring moves. These can be viewed as the '20%' which lead to the '80%' of the result.

For the attacking part of your game you should try to find the '20%' (your effective, high-percentage moves) and devote the bulk of your training resources to perfecting it. This does not mean that you should not use any of your time to practise the fancier or lower percentage moves, just that the bulk of your training should focus on the most commonly encountered positions and the techniques which you feel you will have the most chance of using successfully under pressure.

Note: This is also important regarding defence - commit a large portion of your time learning to defend and counter the most common attacks in your grappling art.

Specific Sparring

Roger Gracie always used to tell me that sparring from specific positions was a far superior method for preparing for jiu jitsu competitions than free sparring, and I noticed a big improvement in my competition results when I followed it.

You can be even more particular than sparring from the positions alone and start to include variables such as time. Multiple-time champion Kron Gracie is known to be very specific in his training, doing drills which include placing himself in a defensive position, down on points with only a minute to escape and submit. The more closely your drills approximate scenarios you're likely to encounter, the better you'll perform in competition.

Note: Stand-Up training is an example of specific element that should be focused on in your competition preparation. Too many jiu jitsu guys neglect this and get a big shock on competition day when they are easily thrown at the start of a match and find themselves down on points. Even if you don't want to be a great take-down specialist you should still train the standing game so that you know how to defend against someone with good judo or wrestling.

PART 5

'Invisible' Jiu Jitsu

"Jiu Jitsu is simple. You just gotta do it right." - Roger Gracie

Awareness

“The highest technique is to have no technique. In sparring there’s no exact path or method, but instead a perceptive, pliable, choiceless awareness.”

- Bruce Lee

Every week I get emailed questions from readers of the Jiu-Jitsu Brotherhood asking things like:

‘There’s this big guy in my class, how do I beat him’ or ‘I can’t get the half-guard to work on this one purple belt’

I find this frustrating because I cannot tell you how or when you will be able to beat a certain opponent. I cannot give you a magic formula or a secret technique that will be your sparring partner’s kryptonite. But what I can share with you is a way to make it so that it’s not an issue anymore.

For me, the answer was to change my jiu jitsu training from an ‘outcome’ based to ‘awareness’ based experience.

When you shift the purpose of your time on the mat from gathering new techniques or winning and losing to the development of your consciousness, you will experience profound changes in your BJJ and many other aspects of your life. Instead of being distracted with events in the future (victory, sweep etc.) or the past (missed submission opportunity, poor referee decision) you will instead begin to operate from the source of your greatest power – the present moment.

What is Awareness?

I have found many definitions, but the two I feel are most appropriate are:

1. Having knowledge or perception of a situation or fact
2. The state or ability to perceive, to feel, or to be conscious of events, objects or sensory patterns.

My definition of awareness in a jiu-jitsu context is:

The dynamic, holistic act of processing and understanding the training experience.

This includes, among other things, knowledge of:

- Your body – its position in space, your breathing rate etc.
- Your environment – the surface of the mat, your kimono etc.

- Your training partner - his weight/pressure, his movements and reactions
- Your technical options – the movements you have mastered

Your awareness can be focused on one of the above or spread out over all of them. I like the analogy of the flashlight and the lantern. When your awareness is concentrated on one thing at the exclusion of all others, it is like a flashlight beaming into a corner of a room. You get a clear view of a small amount of space.

When you broaden and expand your awareness to include the other elements – like a lantern illuminating the entire room – it provides a much broader perspective.

Neither one of these is better than the other, and each has their place. Unfortunately many BJJ fighters only know how to center their awareness on a single aspect (usually technical options), and this can come at the cost of being unable to see the bigger picture.

Awareness Between Two Fighters

Imagine two jiu jitsukas of roughly equal size, technical ability and mental attributes. Let's call them 'white' and 'black'. They touch fists and are about to commence sparring. We can imagine that their awareness combined would resemble something like the figure below, with the light half representing one fighter and the dark half representing the other.



Imagine that during the match white becomes fatigued and black takes mount and starts to apply the cross-choke. White's awareness would shrink and black's would expand to fill the void.

A jiu-jitsu match is just that – a constant ebb and flow of awareness between two fighters. The ultimate contraction in awareness comes with the submission. When you tap it is because the attack has contracted your awareness so dramatically that you are only aware of the sensation in the joint about to become damaged, or the onset of unconsciousness from a neck attack.

Think about this: chokes and strangles, taken to their completion, render a fighter unconscious. A loss of consciousness represents the most complete contraction of awareness.

Learning to notice and feel this expansion and contraction of your own awareness and how it interacts with that of your opponent is a valuable skill.

Why Focus on Awareness?

1. Decreased Reaction Time

Between a stimulus and your response to it there is a window of time. With increases in your awareness that time seems to become longer. This perceived 'expansion' in time will allow you to process more information and improve your reactions.

2. Improved Perception of Options

Awareness allows you to see options you may have previously missed. If your awareness is underdeveloped or restricted you may miss out on submission/escape/sweep opportunities. I see this very often while teaching. A student is so focused on getting a specific move to work that he misses a more effective and superior option that's staring him in the face.

How to Expand Your Awareness

Before I begin training I start to expand my awareness and perception using adaptations from various meditation systems I've been exposed to over the years. I use the following two exercises before I step on the mat to prepare myself for each session.

1. Internal Focus Exercise

Begin by taking several deep, even breaths using this cadence: Four seconds inhalation and four seconds exhalation. Notice how the air passes into your nasal passages through your lungs and down into your belly. Really get a feel for the expansion and contraction of your diaphragm and rib-cage during this process. For even more effectiveness, try to listen to the sound of your breathing at the same time.

Next, start to actively tense and relax the muscle groups over which you have conscious control. Start at your feet and work your way up the top of your head. Combining deep

breathing with muscular contractions helps get you 'out of your head and into your body' which is good for expanding awareness.

2. External Focus Exercise

The objective here is to gather as much sensory information from your environment as possible. Become observant of everything around you. Feel the gi against your skin. Notice the coolness of the mat against the soles of your feet.

Listen to the sounds of the dojo. Using your senses fully to take in what's happening around you will bring you into the present moment and ensure that you get the most out of each session.

Meditation

Besides making me a far happier person, my personal discovery of meditation several years ago had profound and far-reaching effects on all aspects of my life, including my jiu jitsu. I encourage everyone to try it, but I believe it's especially important for jiu jitsukas because it massively increases awareness.

A recent clinical study showed that regular meditation actually increases the size of the part of your brain which processes sensory data. This is a massive benefit to the jiu jitsuka because it means that they can more rapidly and accurately adjust to the sensory feedback from both their own body and their opponents.

Teaching you how to meditate is beyond the scope of this book, but there are many excellent resources available. I highly, highly recommended you give it a try.

Conditioning is Vital

The fitter, stronger and more flexible your body, the better. Nothing contracts your awareness as quickly as gassing. You are unable to think clearly and process information from your environment when you're so exhausted that your tongue is hanging out. If you want to be a good jiu jitsuka you have to be in shape. There's no way around it. You can find more information on BJJ conditioning in the next part of this book.

Breath Control & Relaxation

I have stressed over and over again in this book that breath control is the foundation of all awareness. When your breathing pattern is poor, so too is your awareness. When in doubt, focus your attention on your breathing. Try to make it rhythmic and controlled. This will calm you and clear your mind, and your awareness will expand again.

Your level of relaxation while sparring is also plays a huge role. This is why beginners are

usually so difficult to teach. While sparring they become incredibly tense and can focus on only one thing at a time (which is usually just grabbing and squeezing whatever part of their opponent is closest). The more you relax, the easier it is to become conscious of the learning process and accelerate it.

I realize this way of looking at jiu jitsu may not be appropriate for everyone, and that it may be difficult for some to shift their existing mind-sets. There are however huge rewards for those who are willing and open-minded enough to take the chance and try it out.

The Relaxed & Efficient Grappler

“Notice that the stiffest tree is most easily cracked, while the bamboo or willow survives by bending with the wind.” - Bruce Lee

Although there are specific and usually brief circumstances that will necessitate the use of strength and power on the mat, generally you should try to be as relaxed and efficient as possible.

Internalising this is paramount to your progress in jiu jitsu. If you train without the ability to relax, sooner or later you will become exhausted, overtrained, and more likely than not, injured. Not only that, but training with a super-tense competitive mindset slows your progress down. It's been proven that people learn fastest when they are relaxed.

Now all this is easier said than done. I always have other BJJ instructors asking me things like 'How can I teach my students to relax?'. Understanding these concepts will help a great deal:

Check Your Ego

It's been my experience that the primary factor at play when a student is unable to practise in a calm and controlled manner is his or her own ego.

Nobody likes tapping out. It's hell on the ego. The ego wants to dominate and control and to win at all costs. Let me let you in on a little secret: You're never going to be the best jiu jitsu fighter in the world. You're probably never gonna be the best guy in your academy. But so what? Being the best is a fleeting and painful position to be in. You always have somebody on your ass, trying to take over the top dog spot, and sooner or later, somebody better than you comes along.

Forget about winning or losing – put your focus on learning and developing. It's a much better long-term strategy, trust me.

Regulating Energy Expenditure

Think of your body as a car, and your physical stamina as its gas tank. The tank has a limit to the amount of gas it can hold. You may be able to increase the size of the tank through conditioning training, but it will always have a limit. Now think of any match you fight as a road trip, with a specific beginning and end.

Just imagine if you began the journey with your foot flat and travel at 150 mph. Because your car would be burning gas so quickly, very soon the tank would run dry and you the car would not make it to your destination. If however, you drove at a constant moderate pace, speeding up slightly where necessary and slowing down a bit where possible, you would have enough gas in the tank to make it all the way.

Although it's a relatively simple analogy, it captures perfectly the mindset of the intelligent grappler. Use controlled bursts of energy (put your foot on the gas) when necessary, this is usually when you are in an inferior position and need to escape. Alternatively, conserve energy (take your foot off the gas) when you are in a dominant position.

Precision Movement

My first coach always used to say "If your technique is crude, it will require a lot of power".

The more precise your movements, the less superfluous motion you will make and consequently the less energy you will expend. This means you will be able to grapple for longer before tiring. Provided you are performing the correct movements, the level of precision at which they are executed will greatly influence their effectiveness.

Conversely, if your technique is performed crudely it will usually require a large amount of explosive power or brute strength to compensate, which again will sap energy and lead to fatigue.

Precision is what distinguishes an elite level grappler from the novice and intermediate. You may have noticed at your club or academy how the beginners use wild and uncontrolled movements to achieve their actions, while the high-level guys almost exclusively use small motions and minor adjustments to accomplish their positional and submission objectives.

Unfortunately, there is no short cut to the achieving this required precision, and it will take much practice and repetition to ensure that your movements are reflexively smooth.

Use 'Selective Tension'

Understanding this played a huge role in making me a relaxed and efficient fighter.

As mentioned earlier, being too tense will burn your energy reserves quickly and ruin your game, but there is such a thing as being too relaxed. If your body had absolutely no muscular tension in it you would be unable to create the structures and postures required for jiu jitsu. One of the solutions to this is to be able to selectively tense parts of your anatomy while relaxing others. A great example is attacking from side-control. You might be using controlled contractions (tension) in parts of your upper body (arms, shoulders, upper back) to squeeze your opponent, but the rest of your anatomy should be as relaxed as possible.

You can see a video detailing the concept of 'Selective Tension' here:

<http://tinyurl.com/od7udsy>

Balance

Balance is, in my opinion, one of the most important, if not the most important physical attribute for jiu jitsu fighters.

It's one of the major differences between good grapplers and elite ones. When you're fighting an elite-level guy, often you might think you are about to sweep him – you might even elevate him for a seconds - but because of his highly-tuned sense of balance he effortlessly re-adjusts and nullifies your attempt to reverse him.

I use these four principles to maintain my balance while training.

1. Awareness of center

Approximately two inches beneath your navel lies your center of gravity. The higher this point is from the ground, the more easily you can be swept or rolled off, and the the closer it is towards the ground the better your base.

I read a study once which said that for elite athletes, the focus of their body awareness is around this center of gravity, whereas for the average person it's located instead around their head region. I found this fascinating and began to work on redirecting my awareness towards my center during my jiu jitsu training.

This had a big effect on my balance. In fact, when I'm fighting from any top position, I am constantly trying to 'reset' my awareness back to my center of gravity and checking to see if it's as low as possible.

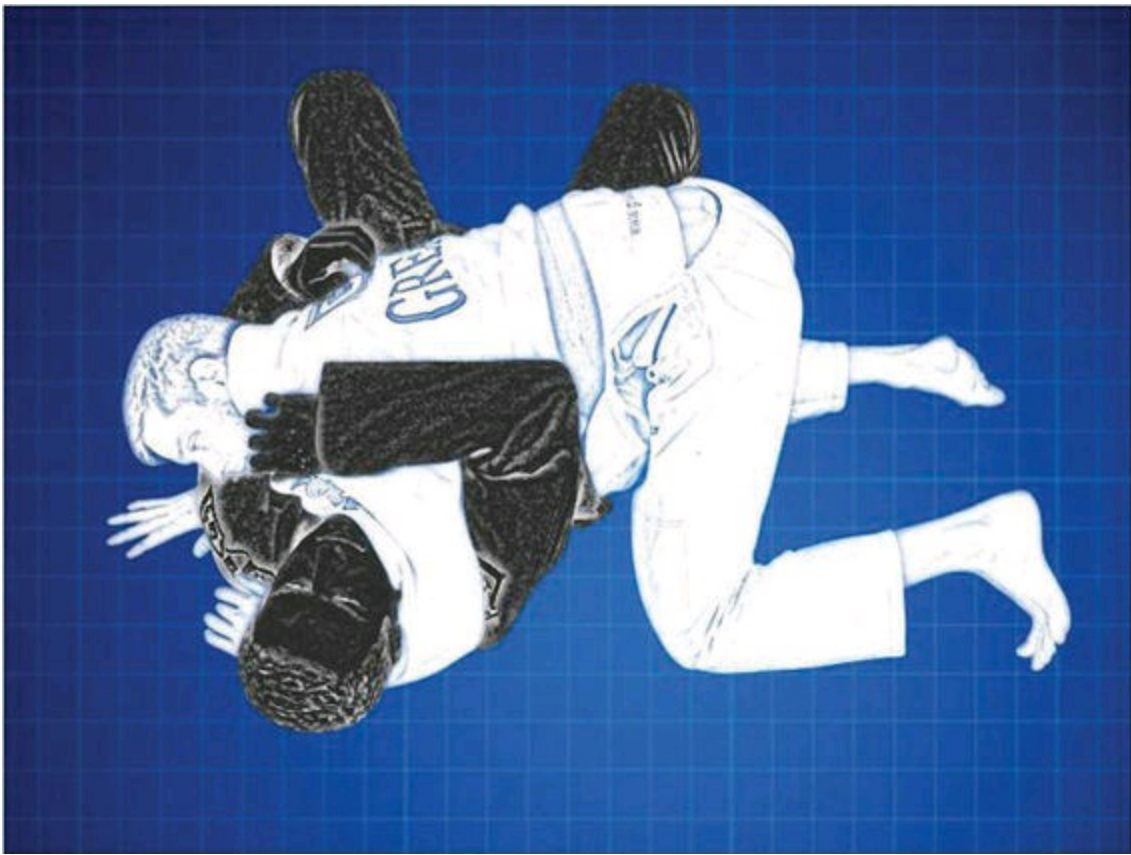


Fig. a - white's balance is poor as his center of gravity is elevated

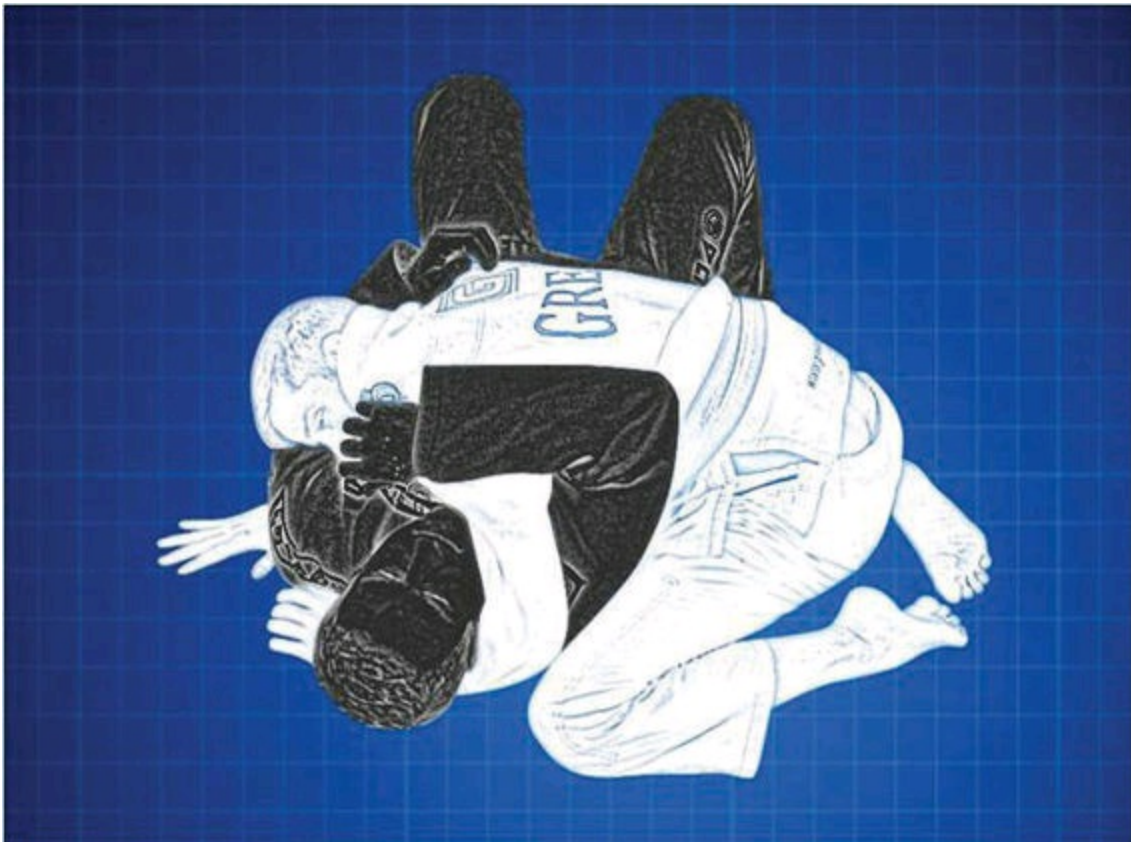


Fig. b - By lowering his hips to the floor, white improves his balance dramatically

I teach my students that whenever they are in mount, side-control, half-guard or anything other top position, to always ask themselves the question "Do I have balance?" before they attempt any movement at all, and I strongly recommend you do the same. If you

are constantly 'sinking' your weight into your center of gravity you will be far, far harder to sweep or reverse.

2. Correct Head Positioning

This is another important tip for maintaining your balance. When you're in an upright position, (important examples include: when sitting in mount or postured up in your opponent's closed guard), think of your head resting atop your center-line (which could be loosely represented by your spine). If your head sits directly atop this line, your balance will be much better than if it is not.

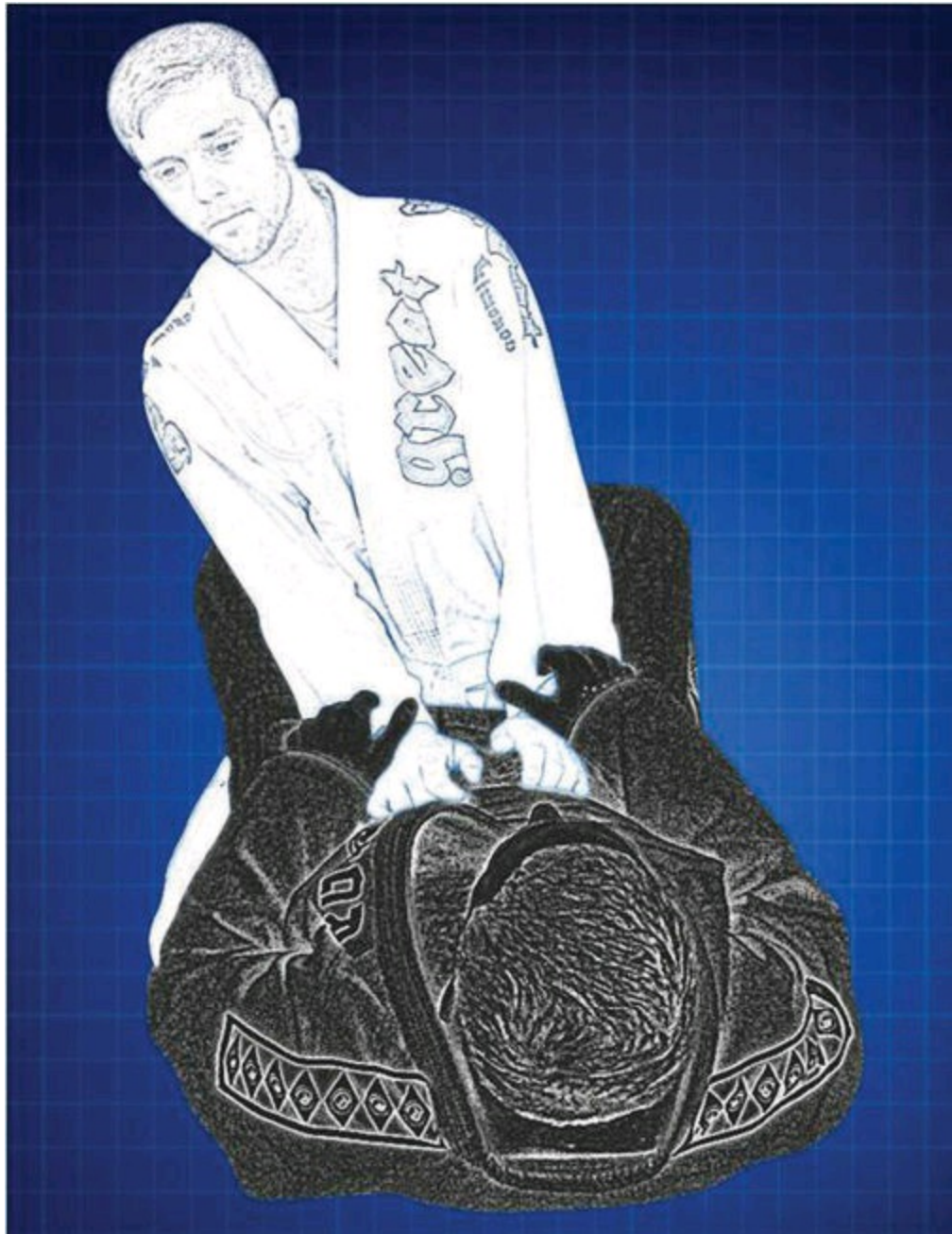


Fig. a - white's balance is poor as his head is off-center

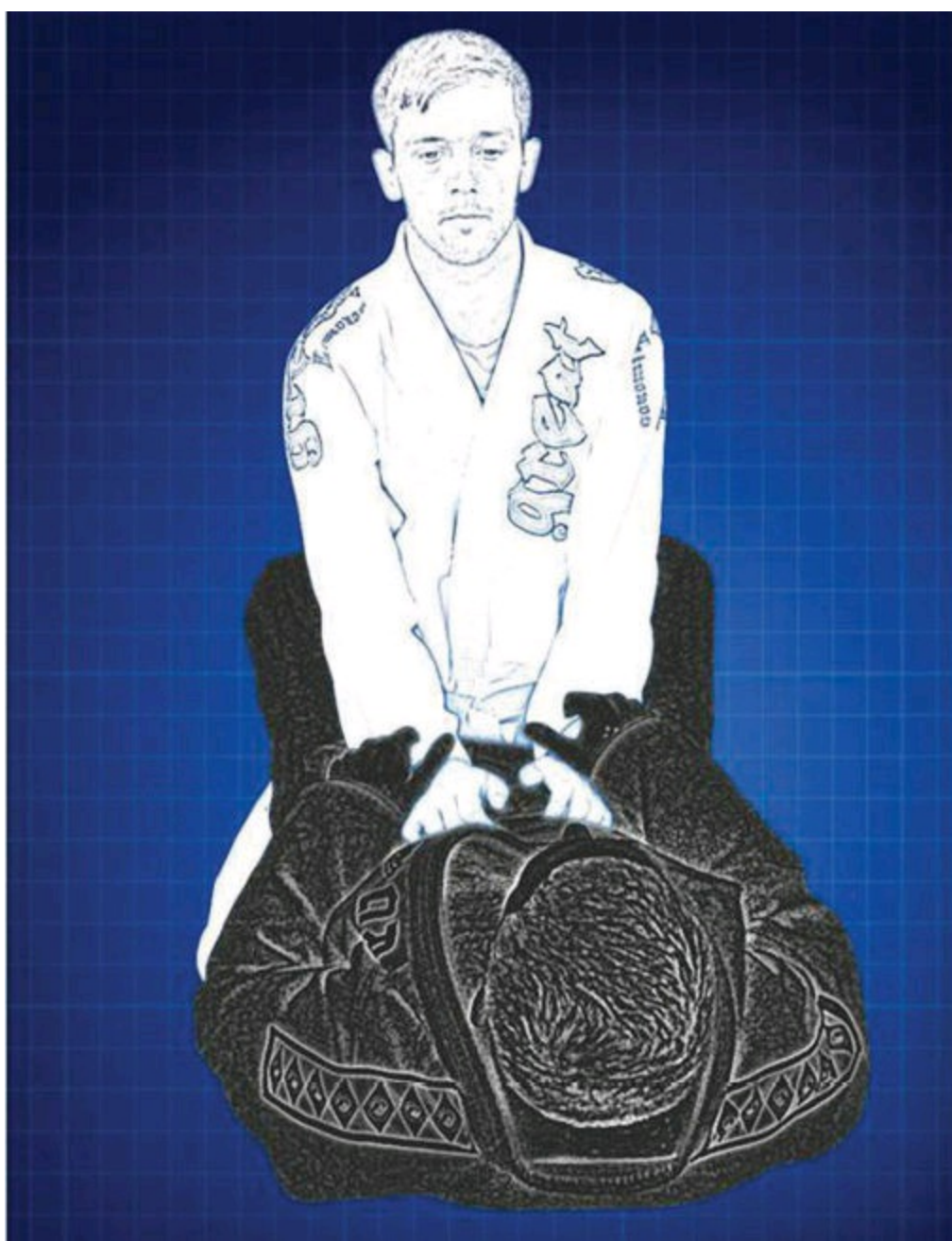


Fig. b - white's balance is good as his head is positioned directly over his spinal column

3. Broadening Your Base

It's logical that the more of your body you have in contact with the mat, the better your balance will be. It doesn't take much to knock over a person who is standing on one toe, but try to roll a person lying flat on their stomach onto their back and it's a completely different story.

But when fighting from the top, often we need to stay agile and be able to transition easily. You cannot do this if you have too much of your surface area in contact with the floor. It's in cases like this that you will need be able to broaden your base.

Wrestlers have a saying "A four-legged table has a stable base, but a two-legged table falls of its own accord" and it's exactly the same in jiu jitsu. If you have only 1 or 2 points

in contact with the mat then you are vulnerable to being flipped. If you add a third you instantly become more stable.

But it goes beyond that. The further you move these points away from each other, the greater the increase in stability. If you deconstruct any sweep, you'll see that at some point it both narrows the defender's base and removes some of his balance points from the mat. So whenever you sense your balance being compromised, try to add an extra contact point and/or broaden your base.

Note: The head is an often over-looked contact point that can be used when limbs are trapped.



Fig. a - white's base is narrow and his contact points are close to each other, hence his base is poor

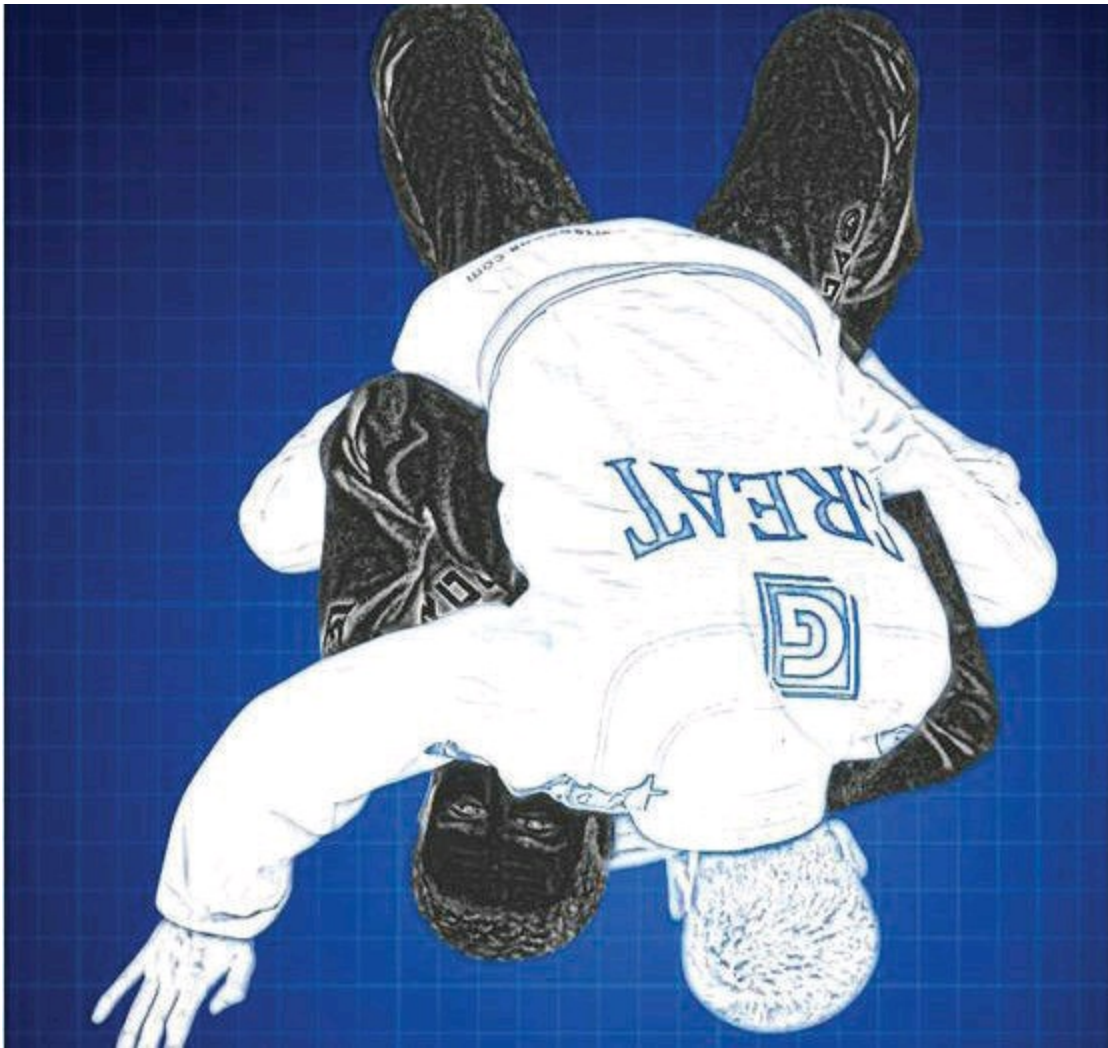


Fig. b - white's balance is improved as he widens his base and adds his head as another contact point

4. Dissipating Tension

The stiffer and tighter you are, the more easily your center of gravity can be elevated, which can lead to you being swept, reversed or thrown.

The best analogy I can think of is a truck tire and a bedsheet. If you try to flip a truck tire, you could probably do it, albeit using strength and power. But imagine trying to flip a bedsheet over completely in a single movement? Although far lighter than the tire, because it has no rigidity or structure, it's far more difficult to invert.

When I feel that my balance is compromised and that I'm in danger of being swept, one of the things I do to counter is try to completely relax my entire body and try to approximate a bedsheet. It doesn't always stop the sweep, but often it buys me a split second to move and save my position.

Training Methods to Improve Balance

1. Training with the Eyes Closed

This is an exceptionally important drill for improving your balance. So much so that I

cover it in further detail in its own chapter later.

2. Unilateral Training

Any movements that you do whilst standing on one leg will improve your balance. There are specific exercises, like pistol squats, which are excellent, but you can also take many existing movements and add a balancing component to them by doing them on one leg.

3. Swiss Ball Training

The Swiss Ball is one of my favourite training tools. When I was a brown belt I started to use it extensively. Not only did it greatly improve my balance, it also gave me a jiu jitsu-specific agility which dramatically upgraded my top game.

You can see two of the world's best grappler's using it effectively here:

<http://tinyurl.com/2awo52r>

Practise Without Your Hands

Almost without exception, one of the most common mistakes novice grapplers make is that they try and move their opponent's entire bodyweight with the strength of their arms. This is due to the fact that the hands and arms are two of the most dexterous and sensitive parts of the human anatomy. As human beings we are accustomed to using them for almost all our day to day tasks, while our legs are usually only employed for standing and walking.

Unfortunately, in grappling, using your arms exclusively is grossly inefficient. On average, the human leg is three times stronger than the human arm, and the trunk as a whole unit is stronger still. Therefore it is vital to learn to access this massive strength reserve. For a good grappler his legs and feet are as nimble as another set of arms and hands, and he employs them to push, pull, lift and pin his opponent.

An excellent way of teaching your body to 'think' with your legs and trunk instead of the arms is to practise sparring with no hands.



Jiu jitsu stand-out kron Gracie is known to spar without using his hands often

You can do this using both positional sparring and free sparring. If you are a Gi grappler, slide both hands through the front of your belt grip at each free end. If your chosen art is submission wrestling, simply cross your arms and grab each opposite shoulder.

Remember that this will require an accommodating sparring partner. Initially he should not go 'flat out' when rolling with you in this manner. In the beginning his goal should not be to submit you but merely to control your body. Once you have become more accustomed to it he should try to look for the finish.

At first, this will feel very awkward and you will have a tendency to cheat by reflexively

reaching out with your hands. Bear with it, because as you gain coordination and sensitivity with your lower body your grappling will improve, especially certain aspects of your game i.e. open guard.

Later, when you reintroduce your arms, try to use the following analogy. Think of your arms as the rudder of a boat. They guide movement but do not provide power. Your legs, hips and lower back are the motor and propeller of the boat. They provide the drive. A classic example of this is the double-leg takedown. You set your 'rudder' (arms) by grabbing behind your opponent's legs and then the 'motor' (legs, trunk) provides the power by driving through and lifting the opponent.

Note: This is not a hard and fast rule – there are several movements that use arm and shoulder strength almost exclusively (a key-lock from side-mount is an example, although even this could be argued), but in general it holds true.

Training with Closed Eyes

Grappling with your eyes closed is an excellent method of gaining sensitivity, balance and timing. When you close your eyes, you lose the balance granted to you by the visual reference points you usually have. As a result, the organs in the inner ear responsible for the body's equilibrium become more finely tuned and your sense of balance increases. This in turn improves your kinesthetic awareness or 'body sense'.

Spatial awareness, the ability to know where your body is in space, is also massively enhanced through closed-eye training. High levels of kinaesthetic and spatial awareness are hallmarks of good athletes and are some of the most vital elements into a well-rounded game.

Your skin contains millions of pressure receptors, and when your eyes are closed it becomes much easier to be aware of the input they are receiving. This will allow you to 'feel' your jiu jitsu more - to become more sensitive to the subtle variances in the weight distribution of both yourself and your opponent.

When you are fighting from the top, the increased sensitivity will allow you to feel where the gaps are in your control positions and hold downs and when fighting from the bottom it will be possible for you to sense where your opponent is applying pressure and where he is off balance and susceptible to sweeps and bridges.

Because this pressure-sensory data is processed much more quickly than visual-sensory data, if you can teach your body to use it as your primary feedback mechanism while fighting, your reaction times will ultimately improve.

Yet another benefit of practicing in this manner is that when your eyes are closed you have a tendency to relax, which as explained elsewhere in this resource, is vital to your grappling progress. So pick a training partner who you trust and grapple with your eyes closed for 20-30 minutes per week. You'll be astonished at how much it improves your game.

The Flow Drill

“It’s like Rickson Gracie said: if there’s no go with the flow,
then flow with the go” - Diego Sanchez

The flow drill is second only to grappling with your eyes closed as a tool for enhancing your understanding of ‘invisible jiu jitsu’ for the following reasons:

- Sensitivity and timing

Hallmarks of ‘invisible jiu jitsu’, few things will improve your sensitivity of your opponent’s movements and the timing of your own more quickly than regular flow-drilling.

- Momentum

Training in this manner teaches you to feel the shifting of your opponent’s weight and use the momentum generated to manipulate his body position, as opposed to having to rely on strength and / or power.

- Conditioning

There are few things that will get your grappling fitness up as quickly as 5-10 minute rounds of the flow drill. If your breathing (notice a trend here?) is not rhythmic and coordinated with your movement, you’ll gas really quickly whilst attempting the flow drill.

- Improves Processing Speed

Consistent use of this drill speeds up how quickly your brain holistically processes the experience of grappling, and can make regular sparring seem much easier afterwards.

I would recommend you follow these guidelines when incorporating the flow drill into your training:

- Choose your training partner wisely

If you decide to do this drill, I cannot stress the importance of a decent training partner. Choose someone who knows how to take his ego out of the equation and wants to train to learn, not to ‘win-at-all-costs’. You will need someone who is comfortable giving you sweep and submission openings or the drill will not work well.

- Focus on breathing

As I keep emphasising in my system, your breath is the ultimate barometer for all aspects of your jiu jitsu. It’s especially important during the flow drill.

- Keep contact

Although the flow drill is a much ‘looser’ exercise than regular sparring, you should try not to disengage from your partner completely - if possible keep at least one part of your body in contact with him at all times.

- **Never stop moving.**

The only way to 'lose' the during the flow drill is to stop moving entirely. When in doubt, don't worry about doing the correct movements, just move.

I generally use two variations in my training. They are:

1. Raw Movement Flow Drill

This version focuses more on the momentum and timing aspects. There are no submissions and gripping is not allowed (because it slows the game down). I use it to sharpen all of my fundamental jiu jitsu movements and really connect with my breath. It also serves as an excellent sport-specific warm up.

2. Submission Flow Drill

Similar to the raw movement drill, but with the addition of gripping and the focus on submissions. These submissions should not be applied hard or taken to the point at which your opponent is forced to tap. Instead, apply the sub lightly and then release it before immediately moving again.

To take things up a level, try doing the flow drill with your eyes closed.

You can watch a video of me describing the flow drill here:

<http://tinyurl.com/bounga5>

PART 6

Improving Off the Mat

“Throughout your life advance daily, becoming more skillful than yesterday, more skillful than today. This is never-ending.” - Yamamoto Tsunetomo

The Power of Visualization

Most of us have limits on when we have access to a mat and training partners. Also, our physiological resources are limited – our bodies can only take a specific amount of training before they require rest. However, almost all of us have wasted time in our day during which we can employ mental repetition and visualization.

There is a story of a Japanese judoka who sustained an injury several months before a major tournament. According to his doctors, the injury would be healed in time for the event – but there was a catch. The afflicted body part would only recover in time if the judoka refrained from all strenuous movements – including training. Being an industrious and committed judoka, he dedicated himself to mentally rehearsing his repertoire of techniques for several hours each day. He went on to win the tournament having done next to no physical training in preparation for it.

A double-blind university study showed that a group of athletes who visualized a specific movement before physically performing it, scored on average 17% higher than a second group which had not. Imagine a 17% improvement in your ability to perform an arm-lock from mount, or a double-leg takedown and you will see the value of mental repetition.

Visualization is relatively simple, but it requires practice and concentration. When you first begin to use it you will become easily distracted by random thoughts, but with dedication you will soon be able to perform hundreds of repetitions in your mind without losing focus.

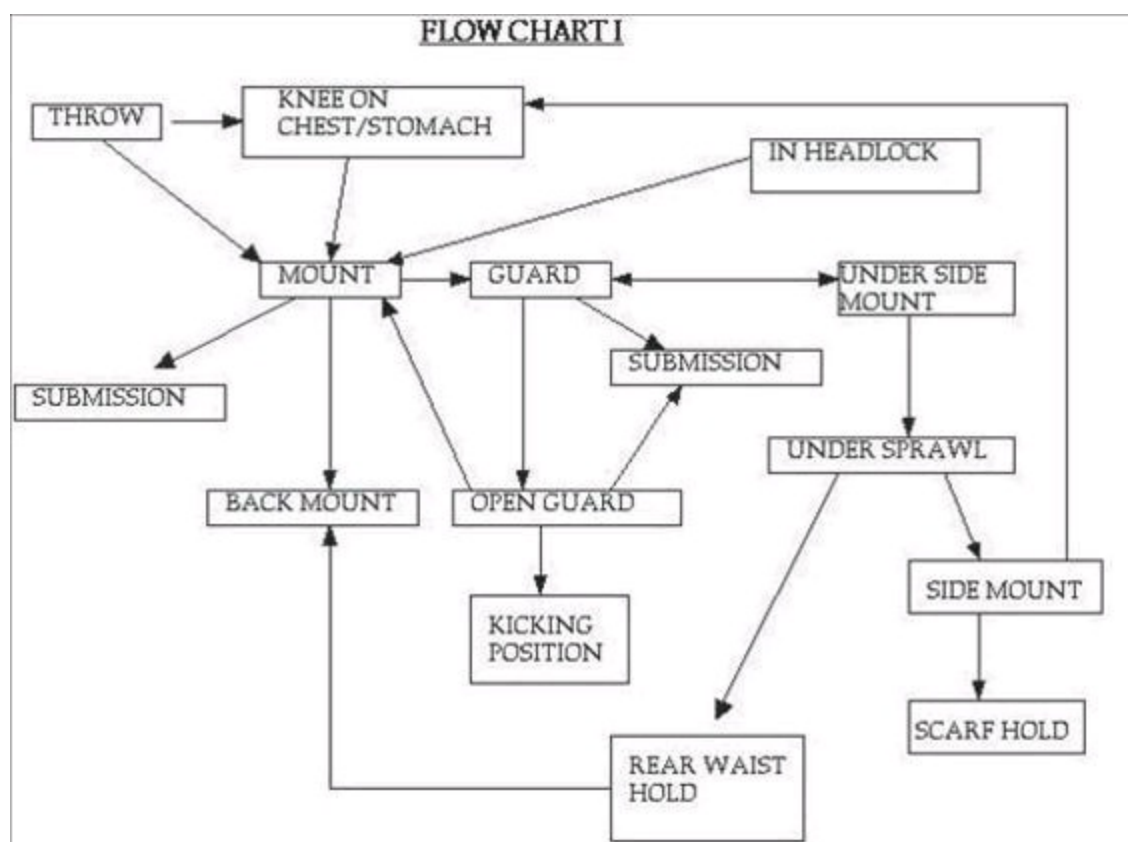
There are several methods of visualization. Effective approaches for grappling involve imagining yourself perform techniques in both first person (inside your body) and third person (picturing yourself as someone else would see you). Besides simply rehearsing techniques in a vacuum, it is possible to use the same visualization principle for entire matches.

The great Frank Shamrock himself sums it up perfectly: 'I use visualization constantly. I relax completely, and create a mental image of the fight in my mind. I see myself against the other fighter, & I see him coming at me. I mentally visualize myself in every conceivable situation.'

In my own experience, visualization has become one of the most important tools in my study of jiu jitsu. As I travel a lot, there are many times that I don't have access to a mat and/or training partners. I find that practising my techniques and combinations in my mind during flights massively improves my recall of old techniques and my retention of new ones.

Flow Diagrams

Right at the start of my grappling career, I stumbled across this flow chart of Rickson Gracie's on the web:



This gives a pretty good insight into the way Rickson thinks. As you can see, his whole game is based around the mount position.

Over the years, I have used flow diagrams a lot. The reason that flow diagrams are such an effective training tool because they instantly let you see where there are gaps in your technical knowledge. Also, just the act of sitting down and making the chart consolidates all your knowledge and reminds you of moves and techniques you may have forgotten.

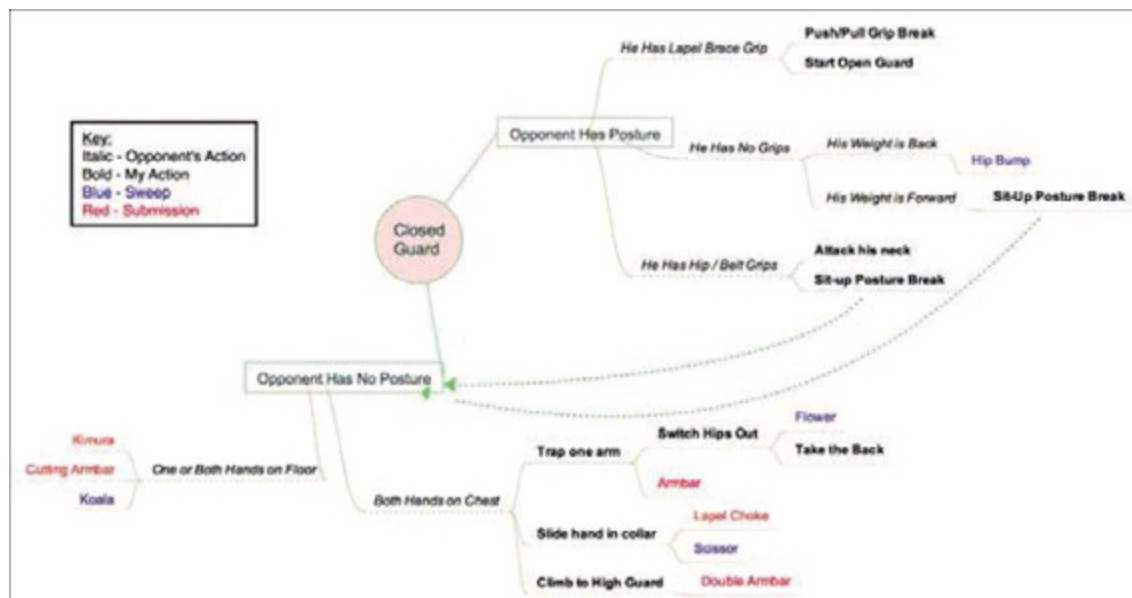
Types of Flow Diagrams

Because jiu jitsu was created around positional strategy, I personally like to create my flow charts around certain positions, i.e. the mount, or closed guard, but there's nothing to stop you from creating more specific diagrams around particular sweeps, submissions or whatever else you might like to use.

Below I have included a very basic closed-guard flow diagram. I usually do my flow charts freehand and then digitize them using mind-mapping software.

So you can see that when I'm fighting from my closed guard, my main strategy is to try to

break my opponent's posture.



How Specific?

If you have a large enough piece of paper, there is no limit to how specific (or broad) you can be with your flow diagrams. As you become more skilled and your depth of technical knowledge increases, the natural progression will be an increase in the complexity of your flow diagrams.

In my opinion, creating flow diagrams for jiu-jitsu is a much more effective method than regular note taking. If I were any good at drawing, I'd even add in little sketches to each of the steps in the flow diagram.

Supplemental Training

If all you do is show up to class and go through motions, you might become a decent black belt, given enough time. You will however, never scratch the surface of your potential without engaging in supplemental training.

I believe that the most important question you need to ask yourself when doing any training to improve your grappling is “Why am I doing this?”. For example, let’s say you are doing a session consisting of jumping jacks, sprints and pull ups. Why are you doing those exercises? How will they aid you, specifically, on the mat. If you can’t answer that question about your workouts or even each specific exercise, then you need to reevaluate what you’re doing.

Below I give a general overview of the supplemental training methods I engage in and, more importantly, why I use them.

Yoga

Yoga is the most widely practiced exercise system in the world. Rickson Gracie is a yoga master, and without question that plays a role in his incredible mat skills.

Regular yoga practice strengthens your muscles, massages your internal organs and calms your mind. But to me, the biggest benefit derived from yoga is flexibility. It increases lubrication of joints, ligaments and tendons and corrects musculoskeletal imbalances that can affect your health and jiu-jitsu performance. I have been so blown-away by yoga that it’s pretty much all the supplemental training I do.

I feel it is so important for creating healthy, balanced jiu jitsukas that I have devoted an entire chapter to it later in this book.

Best for: Flexibility

Climbing

For pure, functional strength that is directly translatable into better jiu jitsu, I haven’t found anything better than rock climbing. The improvement in grip strength alone is worth the effort. After about 6 months of rock-climbing once per week I noticed a major increase in my forearm and finger strength.

Also, I’ve heard of a study on bone density between two control groups, one of weightlifters and one of rock climbers. It apparently found that the climbers had far higher levels of bone density. Obviously, increased bone density is invaluable to a jiu jitsuka. Climbing enhances your balance and weight distribution. What more could a jiu-

jiitsu fighter want? It's fun as hell too.

Best for: Grip Strength

Swimming

Swimming is great for jiu-jitsu. In my opinion it's far superior to running as a form of conditioning because there is no impact on the ankles, knees and hips. It lengthens and strengthens the muscles and opens up the back and shoulders – areas of the body which often tighten up after a lot of grappling.

It's also excellent for breath control and strengthens the heart and lungs. It promotes rhythm and, when done at a slow pace, will help with overtraining and recovery.

Best for: Cardiovascular Fitness

Resistance Training with Equipment

The beauty of using equipment is that it allows great control over the resistance variable of the exercise. When I use weights and kettlebells I tend to focus on compound, multi-joint movements such as full squats, barbell rows and Turkish get-ups. Using rubber cables/strands is also very effective as they more accurately simulate the tensile strength of an opponent.

Best for: Explosive Power, Muscle-specific strengthening

Gymnastic / Bodyweight Training

If you wanted to, you could get in shape to grapple without ever using a pool, weight, cable or any other equipment for that matter. Moving the body through space using push ups, squats and pull ups is a challenging and effective way to build strength and/or endurance. At the more challenging end of the spectrum, gymnastic style movements such as handstands and bridging develop pretty much every attribute.

At the moment I am working with unilateral movements such as pistol squats and one-arm push-ups because I feel they offer the superior functional strength for jiu jitsu.

Best for: Agility, Core Strength

Animal Movements



Practising the animal movements in the sand rapidly increases athletic ability

This is a specialised series of exercises which approximate the movements of certain animals. They are a fantastic complement to jiu jitsu because they mimic the awkward positions you often find yourself in, and also impart better coordination. They also help develop agility and the dynamic strength that jiu jitsu requires.

Best for: Coordination

You can see the excellent black belt and my good friend, Alexis de Bretagne demonstrating a sequence of them here:

<http://tinyurl.com/nrnook>

Basic Conditioning Workout

Note: As with any type of strenuous activity there is the potential for injury if your form is poor or you have pre-existing imbalances or weaknesses. If you are at all unsure as to how to perform these exercises, you should consult a personal trainer or your jiu jitsu instructor. I know you hate to hear it, but you should also consult your doctor before commencing any form of exercise.

One of the most important sayings I have heard regarding training for sports is: “You don’t play sports to get fit; you get fit to play sports.” This is especially true for martial arts.

I gave a general overview of the different kinds of supplemental training I use for my jiu jitsu in a previous chapter, but I realise that not everybody has the time, energy or inclination to be able to utilise all of them.

I have included a simple workout which fuses elements of several supplemental training methods (yoga, calisthenics, resistance training) and requires very little equipment. All you need is your own bodyweight and a kettlebell weighing between 12-18kgs.

The format of the workout is:

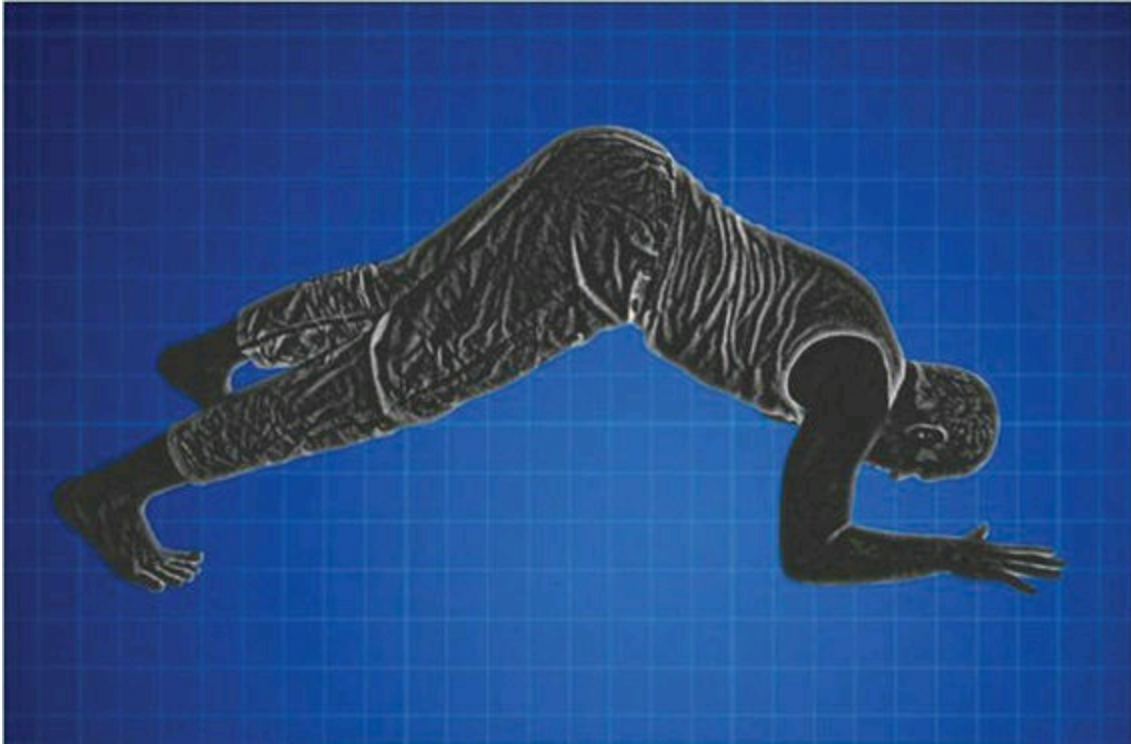
- Warm Up
- Main Part
- Cool Down (optional)

Warm Up

For the warm-up you can use any light, cyclic activity, combined with several dynamic stretches and joint rotations. An excellent example would be 5-10 minutes of skipping followed by several repetitions of the yoga sun-salutation.

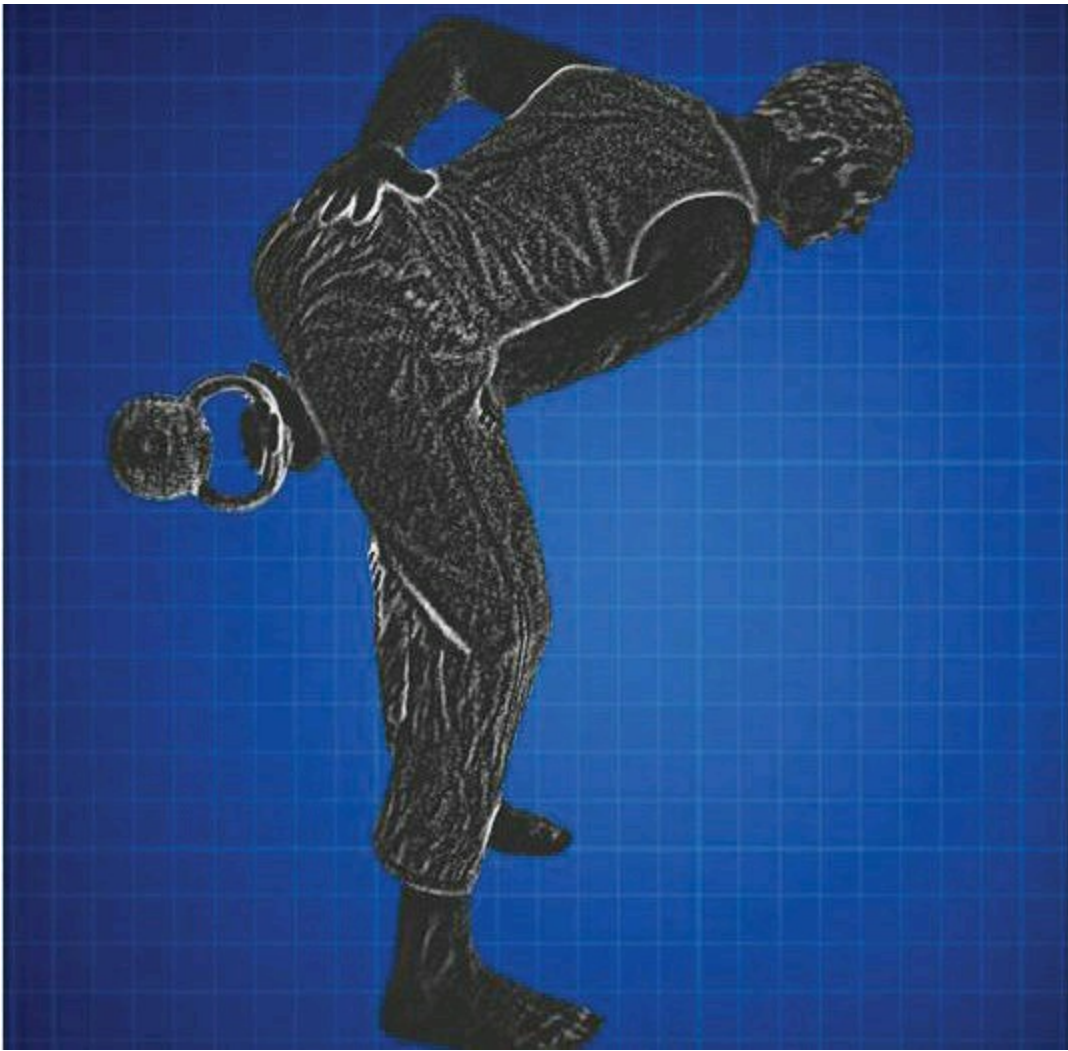
Main Part

- Hindu Push-Ups



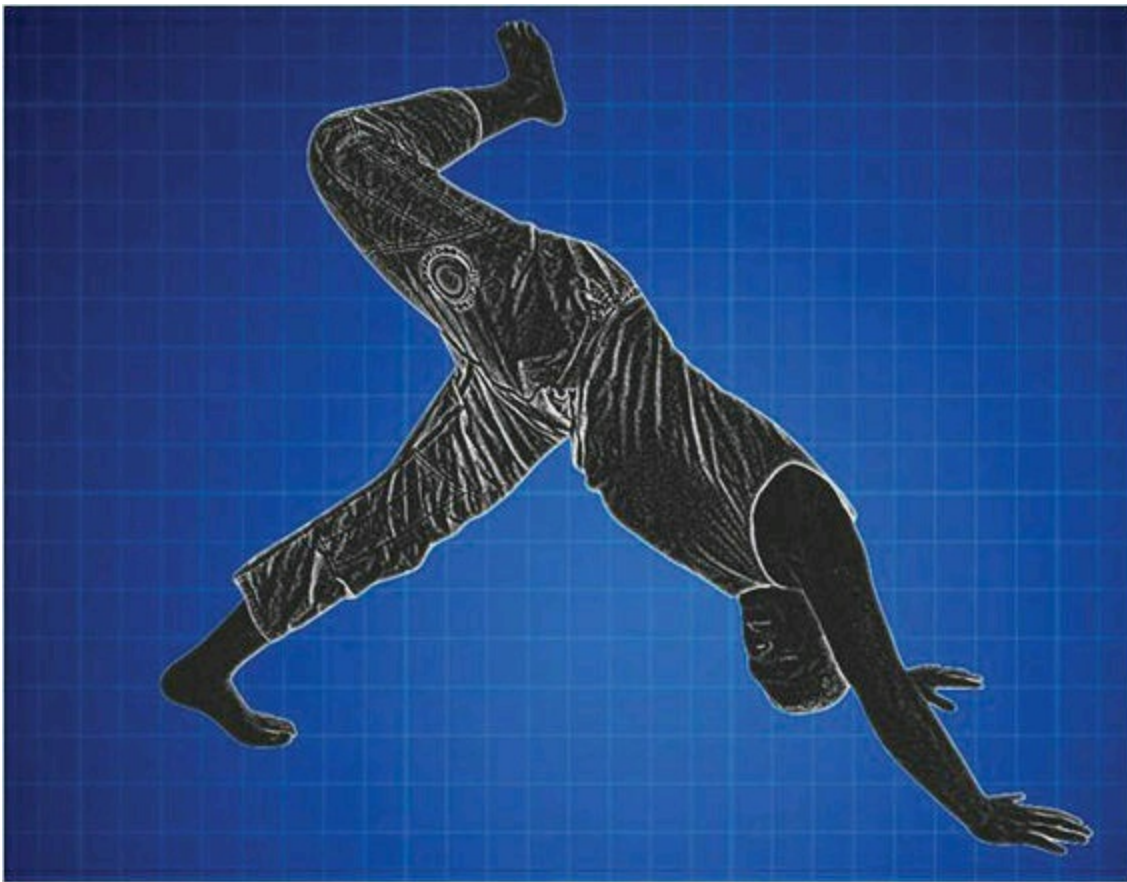
The hindu push-up is excellent for developing upper-body strength that translates well to grappling

- Single Handed Kettlebell Swing



Kettlebell swings develop lung power and posterior-chain strength and power

- Scorpion (also known as the tri-dog in yoga)



The tri-dog helps open up all the tissues in the hips and back which can become tight from jiu jitsu training

Protocol: Start with 10 of repetitions of exercise and perform them back to back in a circuit. Rest one minute and then repeat 4 times for a total of 5 sets.

Cool Down

Choose a static-stretch for each of your main muscle groups and hold it for 30 seconds.

As your fitness improves, you can increase the load by increase the number of repetitions per set, decreasing the rest period or using a heavier kettlebell. The entire workout should take no longer than 30-40 minutes. Try to do it 2-3 times per week, and not on consecutive days.

It should not leave you wheezing and ready to puke - this is not cross-fit. You should finish energised, not exhausted.

As stated previously, this is a simple workout. It's merely an introduction to supplemental training. I'm confident and optimistic that after you practise it for several weeks you will outgrow it and seek out something more complex.

Here is a video of me demonstrating the exercises of the main part of the workout:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1jO5PYenLKY>

Yoga & Jiu Jitsu

Of all the additional systems and methods I've used to improve my jiu jitsu ability, I consider yoga to be by far the most effective. So much so, that I've drastically reduced all other supplemental training from my regime. At this point, I feel I get a far bigger return investing my limited time into the practise of yoga.

The Gracie Connection

At the very start of my grappling career one of the first videos I watched was 'Choke', the documentary about Rickson Gracie (if you haven't seen it you can watch it for free on YouTube - you won't regret it). I was completely blown away by the levels of grace, balance and power which Rickson brought to his practice of jiu jitsu.

I was also astounded by the physical feats of breath control and balance that he displayed during his training sessions. I later found out that many of these were advanced yoga techniques, and realised that Rickson owed a large portion of his legendary abilities to his yoga prowess.

This planted a seed in my mind, and although I didn't take up yoga seriously until several years later, I instinctively knew that there was truth in it.

What is yoga?

Yoga is a commonly used generic term for a collection of physical, mental, and spiritual disciplines which originated in India. It is an extremely complex and diverse system which embraces many different aspects of the human experience.

The yoga most commonly practised in the west, which you see in health clubs and studios, is usually some derivative of the physical component of 'Hatha' yoga. This aspect of yoga is largely concerned with asanas, which refer to the body positions and physical postures which are held during practise, and vinyasa – a specific sequence of breath-synchronised movements used to transition between sustained asanas.

How will it help my jiu jitsu?

It almost seems as if the arts of jiu jitsu and yoga were designed to complement each other. There are so many similarities and mirrored truths between the two of them. It's not surprising that they both have roots which are entwined with buddhism and ancient India. In fact, I have started thinking of jiu jitsu as a sort of 'combat yoga'.

Besides having been proven to alleviate depression, high blood pressure and a host of other physical ailments, yoga will also help your BJJ in many specific ways, several of

which I have outlined below:

Correction of imbalances

Jiu jitsu often causes poor posture and musculoskeletal imbalances. There's an acronym in sports science called 'SAID'. It stands for **S**pecific **A**daptation to **I**mposed **D**emands. It refers to the observation that the body will quite rapidly become adapted to the positions or activities it encounters most often.

One of the most commonly 'imposed demands' of jiu jitsu is contraction. When you're in guard, attacking from the side mount, back and many of the other positions, your body is in a contracted state. The upper back is often rounded as you are holding onto your opponent, the hip flexors and psoas are usually tightened because the knees are tucked up towards the chest, and as for the neck and shoulders – well if you've been training for any length of time you'll know exactly what I'm talking about.

This excessive contraction is even more pronounced in the primary defensive postures, like the turtle position. (Interestingly, the ageing process is also characterised by contraction – this is why old people start to hunch over.)

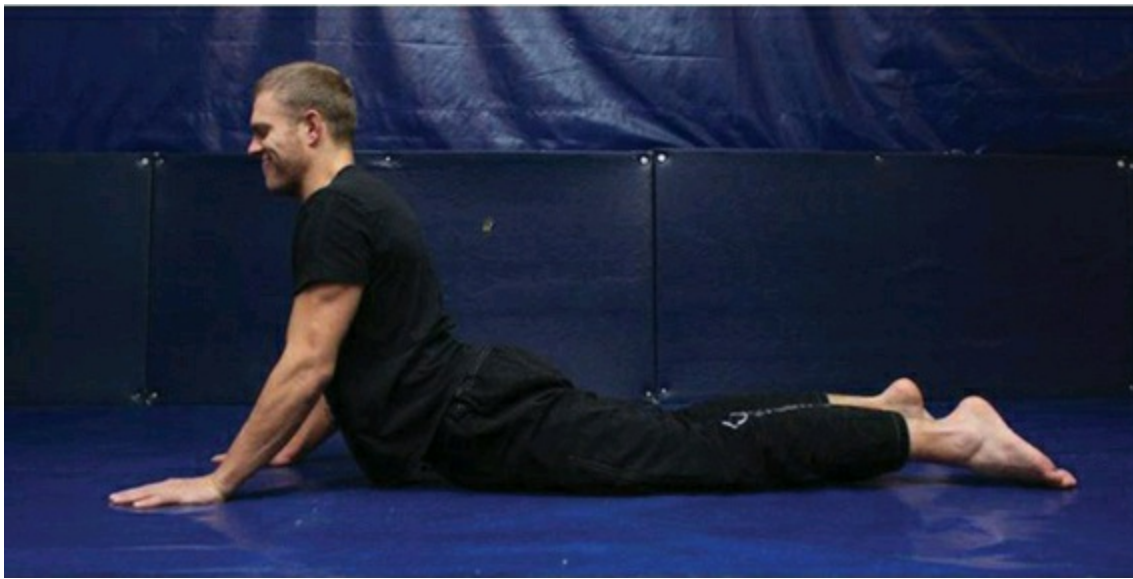
Regular practise of the various asanas and vinyasas is the best remedy I've found for this imbalanced state, due to their two-fold effect of lengthening and opening the body. As an added bonus, many of your submissions will also improve. Remember the 'expansion' concept we discussed earlier? It's hard to use 'expand' the body when you've been contracting it for so long, and yoga addresses this effectively.

Improved flexibility

I've never been a particularly flexible individual. I've always looked at the more supple jiu jitsu practitioners with equal parts of both awe and envy. We all know that guy who can wrap his legs around your waist from the bottom of mount and sweep you off – there's one in every academy.

About three years ago, when I turned 30 I made a promise to myself that I would do whatever it took to become a flexible person. I investigated several stretching methods and found that few of them increased my flexibility as quickly or extensively as yoga.

Although you can get away without being flexible in jiu jitsu, it's an attribute that's unquestionably beneficial. The greater the range of motion in your joints, the more options you will have in each position. In fact, some parts of jiu jitsu will be completely inaccessible to you until you develop the required suppleness, Eddie Bravo's rubber guard being a good example.



Cobra pose helps to correct jiu jitsu related imbalances by 'opening' the front of the body.

Increased strength and balance

The kind of strength developed through yoga practise is unlike anything else I've experienced. Over the past couple of decades the phrase 'core strength' has become a popular in sports training but yoga goes beyond that.

Diligent practise develops what I call 'intelligent strength'. Not only does it train the central nervous system to fire muscles in the correct sequence, it also teaches you which muscles to engage to to maintain postural alignment and efficiently move your anatomy through space. And we all know that good posture and moving efficiently are hallmarks of superior jiu jitsu.

Also, holding the asanas develops an muscular endurance which is perfectly suited to the isometric contractions required for applying chokes and strangles. And although it tones and strengthens, yoga does not produce excessive muscle hypertrophy. Too much muscle mass is not good for jiu jitsu because it burns oxygen quickly and inhibits movement. Consistent practice (combined with good diet) will reset your body to its optimum tissue composition.

Balance

By now you should know how important balance is, and yoga is an exceptional way to improve it. Many of the standing asanas are done unilaterally (on one leg), which not only improves stability but sport-specific strength as well. I've seen professional athletes challenged by the most simple of these postures. Mastering them will massively improve your top game by making you far harder to sweep. It'll also improve throws and takedowns.

Body awareness and breath control

The increase in body awareness gained from yoga practise cannot be overstated. One of the most valuable ways this is achieved is through breath control. Not only will the vinyasas teach you to coordinate your movement and breathing, but yogic techniques such as pranayama will enable you to engage your diaphragm and utilise your lungs to their full capacity. This will greatly improve your stamina during rolling.

Polishing the mind

Besides all the numerous physical benefits, yoga has extensive, positive mental effects.

Some of the more challenging asanas require immense concentration, and synchronizing the movement and breathing during vinyasa cultivates a certain focus and stillness of the mind which is invaluable during the heat of a difficult sparring match. I've also noticed that memorising the sanskrit names of the various asanas as well as their correct alignments has much overlap with learning BJJ techniques.

Where do I start?

I personally do not recommend training on your own using books or videos, unless you already have high levels of body awareness and are very experienced with physical disciplines. Yoga can be dangerous if practised incorrectly and you're better off utilising an instructor, especially as a beginner.

There are countless different types of yoga class available but the main ones you'll encounter are:

Iyengar

This style focuses on the physical alignment of the body in the various asanas. It often uses various supports or 'props' to facilitate the poses for beginners and the less flexible. It has very little vinyasa between postures.

Best for: correcting muscular/postural imbalances, less athletic individuals.

Vinyasa

Vinyasa yoga, in which movement is coordinated to the breath, is a term that covers a broad range of yoga classes. This style is sometimes also called flow yoga, because of the smooth way that the poses run together and become like a dance.

I personally find vinyasa classes some of the most challenging. I like the fact that each class is usually quite different, and that the pace and intensity closely approximate jiu jitsu.

Best for: muscular endurance, dynamic flexibility.

Ashtanga

This is a form of vinyasa which is characterised by a much more regimented sequence of asanas and vinyasas, so much so that every class you do will be almost exactly the same. It's very effective but some people become bored by the lack of variety.

It uses a very specific form of yogic breathing called 'ujjayi' which has good application for BJJ.

Best for: breath control, coordination, memory

Bikram / 'Hot' Yoga

The main differentiating factor of bikram is that it is done in a heated room. This (and other styles of 'hot yoga' have become very popular as of late. Due to the heat and humidity, bikram can be a little extreme, and I wouldn't recommend it for anyone in poor shape.

Although I feel that most other hatha styles are superior, I think that the discomfort caused by the humidity might be good for developing mental strength that could transfer well to BJJ.

Best for: focus, fat-loss

What to be aware of

Just as there are poor jiu jitsu instructors, so too are there third-rate yoga teachers. Overly commercial yoga schools should also be avoided. Try several different types of classes and instructors. You will instinctively know which is most beneficial to you.

Be aware of the tendency to push yourself too hard during classes. This is common for jiu jitsu guys, who usually adopt the 'harder, stronger, faster' approach to training. Yoga doesn't work that way. Intensity is good, but pain is not. Remember, the path of the yogi is the same as that of the jiu jitsuka; it's a life-long journey and there is no rush.

I'm certain that diligent and consistent practise of yoga will not only get you to your black belt faster, but it will also help ensure a long and healthy career on the mats.

Nutrition for Jiu Jitsu

Over the past several years I have made a reasonably in-depth examination of nutrition for jiu jitsu and its effect on my training, using my body and my jiu jitsu as a case study. As I've become older, I've begun to take my nutrition even more seriously. In doing so I've been rewarded with, amongst other things, clearer thinking, faster recovery and improved joint-mobility.

Below I will attempt to summarize what I have discovered. I am not claiming it is absolute truth, only a truth that resonates with me. You do not have to believe anything I say. Research it for yourself, and more importantly, test it subjectively.

Eliminate Sugar

According to many nutritional experts, sugar is one of the main causes of inflammation in the human body. It doesn't take much intelligence to realize that inflammation is a jiu jitsuka's enemy. Hard training itself leads to inflammation which requires requires plenty of rest, so adding a dietary cause of inflammation is unwise. Note that sugar takes many, many forms. Check your food labels for the following, all of which are just forms of sugar: Glucose, Glucose Syrup, Fructose, High Fructose Corn Syrup, Invert Sugar, Dextrose, Maltodextrin and Sucrose.



The Gracie family understands the importance of quality nutrition for jiu jitsu

Limit Meat Consumption

Although I am almost completely vegetarian, I do believe that a moderate amount of meat has its place in a fighters' diet. Most westerners however, plan their diets around meat, chicken and fish. Meat is quite taxing on the stomach, requiring a lot of energy to

digest. This is energy that could be used for training and recovery. Also, most meat available today is a far-cry from the food that our ancestors were eating. It is derived from animals that have been mistreated and injected with various drugs, all of which indirectly enter the system of whoever consumes it and can cause negative effects. If you eat meat, try to limit the amounts, and ensure it is of high quality, preferably from free-range, grass-fed animals.

Limit Dairy Consumption

Contrary to popular belief, you do not need dairy products for calcium. This is a fallacy perpetuated by the dairy industry. Many studies have shown that the calcium in dairy products actually leaches calcium from the bones, causing them to become brittle. Evidence of this is the relatively low incidence of osteoporosis in nations with minimal dairy consumption. As a jiu jitsu practitioner, the strength of your skeletal structure is paramount, so eating something that may weaken it is counter-productive. Dairy products are also extremely acid-forming in the body. An overly acidic body is prone to rapid muscular fatigue, which I am sure you will agree is not something you want during your jiu-jitsu career. If you do consume dairy products, again, ensure that they are minimally processed and preferably unpasteurised.

Eliminate Gluten

Gluten is a protein found in modern strains of wheat, and more and more research is showing that it is detrimental to the human body. I have found that when I eliminate it from my diet, I lose fat and have more energy, and if I reintroduce it I instantly get stomach bloating and sometimes even skin rashes. Everyone's tolerance to it is different, but in my mind it is unequivocally detrimental to jiu jitsu fighters.

Avoid Large Meals

Rickson Gracie once said that the biggest workout your body does on a daily basis is digestion. It is logical to assume that the larger the portion of food you consume, the greater the tax on your system. This is why we usually become sleepy after a big meal. The less food you have in your system, the more of your resources can be devoted to training.

Avoid Processed Food Products and Preservatives

The body is an organism which functions most efficiently on nutrients derived from food consumed in its natural state. Candy, soda, crackers, meal replacement bars, breakfast cereals and the like are not food, they are food products. They are very often devoid of nutritional value and do little to satisfy hunger or the requirements of the body. This is why you can eat 15 cookies in a row and still be hungry.

It is wise to try and eat food that has undergone little or no processing. An apple is far superior to apple fruit roll-up. Freshly squeezed orange juice is better than the pasteurized, bottled version, and a whole orange is better yet. Avoid anything with chemical names on the label. These substances are toxic to the body and will hold you back as a fighter.

Maximise Fruit and Vegetables Intake

Raw or lightly cooked fruit and vegetables are quickly and easily digested, provide a large amount of energy, and contain high quantities of bio-available nutrients. The more raw, plant matter in your diet, the better you will feel, and the faster you will recover. My research has led me to believe that leafy green vegetables such as spinach and kale, as well as those of the cruciferous variety like broccoli and cauliflower are the most beneficial to overall health.

Eat Nuts and Seeds (in moderation)

Raw, unsalted nuts provide an excellent source of protein. The most nutritious are Macadamias, Brazil nuts, almonds and walnuts. The least nutritious are peanuts and cashews. Be careful not to overdo it though, as excessive intake of nuts can make you feel sluggish. Also, all nuts and seed should be soaked/sprouted before consumption, as this removes the anti-nutrient coating.

Fresh Squeeze / Blend Your Juices

If you are going to drink anything besides water, try to make it freshly squeezed juice. The stuff you buy in a supermarket is not freshly squeezed juice. 99% of all boxed and bottled juice has been pasteurized at least once. This means it has been heated to a very high temperature, which destroys almost all of the vitamin and mineral content and renders it close to sugar-water in nutritional value.

Also, once juice is squeezed it oxidizes very quickly, so it's best to consume it immediately. Invest in a juicer or preferably a blender – a glass of fresh juice before a training session will provide energy and a glass afterwards will replenish it. Blending is preferable where possible as it does not remove the finer of the plant, which helps minimise the impact of the liquid on blood sugar levels.

My Perfect Food

If I were forced to subsist on just one food, it would have to be coconuts. I really do believe that the coconut will be eventually recognised as the health-miracle of the 21st century.

If you can get fresh, young coconuts (the green ones) they provide not only the best possible 'sports drink' but also an excellent snack if you scoop out and eat the flesh after drinking.

Coconut flesh and the oil it produces has benefits in terms of cardiac illness, alzheimers, immune problems (and even cancer according to some research.) It contains some of the highest quality fat on the planet and also has anti-microbial properties.

Try Fasting

Most of us eat too much and too often. Our systems are overburdened by all the food and chemicals we subject them to. Fasting gives the body a chance to divert its resources from digestion to healing.

If you have the willpower to make it through a 24 hour fast, you will be amazed at how good you will feel. If this is too much for you, see if you can skip a couple of meals every few days by following an intermittent fasting protocol. The trade-off for a little hunger will be increased energy and clarity of mind, two things invaluable to a jiu jitsuka.

PART 7

The Jiu Jitsu Lifestyle

“Jiu-Jitsu is like being a Jedi knight... The knowledge is with you all the time - You dream it when you sleep, you can see it walking, it surrounds you. You go out alone, but you are not alone because you have Jiu-Jitsu” - Olavo Abreu

The Essence of Jiu Jitsu

“Every block of stone has a statue inside it and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it” - Michelangelo

Now that Brazilian jiu jitsu and the UFC have become global phenomena, I can't help but feel that the martial arts have lost a certain something.

For every humble and balanced Marcelo Garcia out there, there are a thousand guys in Affliction t-shirts training at 'Death-Kill MMA' or someplace similar.

I've owned my share of Tapout clothing and God only knows I've indulged the aggressive aspects of my nature on the mat, but at this point in my life jiu jitsu is not about that anymore. One event in particular was responsible for a complete change in my comprehension.

It was in early 2005 during my first trip to Brazil to train at the world-famous Gracie Barra headquarters in Barra da Tijuca, Rio.

It was close to the end of an intense training session and after several tough matches in the humidity, the entire class was gassed.

I was 26-years-old, a strong purple belt at the time, coursing with testosterone and ambition. Physically, I was not far off my prime. Add in a burning desire to reach the black belt and you had a recipe for a pretty tough grappler. I could give most black belts a run for their money and even beat a few of them.

There was one more bout to go, and I looked around the mat for what I considered would be a 'light roll'.

I noticed a guy who I had not yet sparred with. He was a black-belt, about 45 years old, and looked in reasonable (but not great) shape. I thought to myself 'Let me give this old dude a decent workout'.

To my complete astonishment, the guy absolutely destroyed me. And the cool thing was the way he did it. With each movement, grip, and counter he was as clinical as a surgeon wielding a scalpel. He moved with a balance and grace I had not experienced on the mat before.

Now it's one thing to be whipped by a 24 year-old, 100kg Roger Gracie. It's another thing entirely being crushed by a guy old enough to be your dad who looks like he's a dentist.

As a consequence of that humbling experience, my understanding and perception of jiu jitsu shifted forever. It was the start of a new attitude towards training that focused on what I now believe is the very essence of BJJ and combat sports.

Efficiency and Art

Jiu jitsu, like nature, is all about the conservation of energy. In jiu jitsu 'efficiency' means using only as little strength and power as is required to accomplish your objectives. It means economy of motion - eliminating wasted movements and effort.

An incredible grappler once said to me 'You can always tell a good jiu jitsu guy by the way he looks at the end of a hard roll. He'll be breathing through his nose.'

This can never be achieved by someone who is hemorrhaging energy through sloppy technique. Efficiency allows you to train longer.

Moving cleanly and efficiently is easy when all you're doing is hitting a bag or practising a kata against thin air. It's a little bit more challenging when you're wrestling against a motivated sparring partner. But ultimately it's very rewarding.

The interesting thing is that the more efficient your grappling becomes, the better it starts to look. Once efficiency has been mastered, the next level of understanding jiu-jitsu is to see it as an art form.

I'm not the toughest guy out. I'm not Roger Gracie. I haven't won any world championships. I don't have the flashiest techniques and I'm sure as hell not untappable. But I have an instinct for beautiful jiu jitsu. This is my gift and my curse. I can see 'ideal' jiu jitsu in my mind. I just can't do it yet.

Constant Refinement

Each of us has a perfect game. Although few of us will ever reach it, with every training session we move closer to it. Sometimes it may not seem so, but every roll and drill we do chips away a piece of the marble and moves the statue closer to completion.



Jiu Jitsu is art, meditation and a form of communication

I don't care about winning competitions or stripes on my belt anymore. I'm not even concerned about submitting my opponents in training. I care about moving with grace and about making my jiu jitsu as fluid and elegant as possible. I'm devoted to the very craft of it.

The legendary Rickson Gracie said that it wasn't enough to beat your opponent, but that you had to make it look good too. I understand this now. The martial artist is no different from a writer or a painter. The very act of expressing himself through his art is his joy. You guys know this already - how cool does it feel inventing new and creative methods to escape, move and submit?

The Empty Jacket

One interpretation of the translation of jiu jitsu is 'yielding technique', and knowing how to yield to an opponent's attacks and then use timing to subvert them is truly a thing of beauty.

An old-school judoka once spoke to me of an experience training with a master. He said that it seemed like he was 'fighting an empty jacket'. He felt that all of his own movements were ineffective and awkward in comparison. Every time he initiated an attack he met nothing but empty space before being swiftly thrown.

To me, this style is the most beautiful of all. Nothing satisfies me more than becoming the 'empty jacket' during my own jiu jitsu experiences.

Smashing guys in competition or grinding through somebody's guard doesn't interest me. Being able to move with such perfect coordination and balance that my opponent feels

like I'm reading his mind is what I'm striving for. This allows me to focus on the process instead of the goal, which in turn brings me into the present moment, where my jiu jitsu is always at its best.

Presence and Perception

Jiu jitsu, by its very nature destroys delusion. The global début of the system in the first UFC was a great wake-up call to the martial arts world, showing what was real and what was not. If it weren't for jiu jitsu, you might be training in Joe- Son-Do or trying to master the Dim-Mak.

We all have our own mental filters which we impose on reality. With my life, I am always trying to clear these filters and see reality as clearly as possible.

Jiu jitsu also helps me a lot with this. I have a tendency to get 'stuck in my head' and very often a good session on the mat is the only thing that can snap me out of it. I cannot be worried about my bank balance or an argument I had with a girlfriend while somebody is trying to strangle me.

All of your rationalizations and delusions fall away when you're sparring with a good opponent. You cannot kid yourself. You cannot worry about the future or dwell on the past. You have to be completely in the moment.

In fact, I have a theory that the best fighters are those who have the clearest perceptions of the situations and variables encountered, be they timing, pressure or technical opportunities. They are the people who are most able to be 'present' on the mat. Roger Gracie is an excellent example of this.

Life is Jiu-Jitsu

It's my belief that highest level of jiu jitsu is encountered off the mat. Life is just one big jiu jitsu match. Perhaps the biggest gift I received from my involvement with the art is the ability to identify and apply this understanding.

A favourite film of mine is 'Peaceful Warrior'. It's about an arrogant young gymnast, Dan, who struggles to overcome his fears and ego. He meets an old man named Socrates who becomes his mentor.

In one scene, Socrates says to Dan 'Do you know what's the difference between me and you? You practise gymnastics, I practise everything!'

Jiu jitsu taught me to practise everything. It showed me that there are superior ways to do just about anything in life, whether it be relating to people, walking up a flight of

stairs or even just breathing. I move through the world in a completely different way now. I try to see everything as an opportunity to centre myself and apply leverage, just as if I were rolling on the mat.

Most of us are never going to be mundial-winning superstars. But we can all ditch the Tap-Out t-shirts, focus on the moment and make our jiu jitsu beautiful.

Competing

I remember the first grappling competition I entered, almost 15 years ago. The fear and anxiety almost completely consumed me. Amazingly, despite horrible performances, I managed to win some of my matches through brute strength and sheer will. What I noticed was that all the training I had done and all the techniques I had learned up until that point went out the window the moment the fights began. My fear, anxiety and anger had come between me and the modest amount of technical knowledge I had acquired.

Over the years, although I have managed to gain some control over my emotions prior to competitions, and hence I have greater access to my techniques and skills. The fear and anxiety are always there - and they always will be, it's that my control over them continues you grow, and they become more manageable. But this only comes with experience.

I always urge the beginners at our academy to enter upcoming competitions. The sense of achievement gained from competition cannot be overestimated. By my own estimation, 1 minute of competition is equivalent to approximately 30 to 40 mins of regular sparring/mat time with regard to the expansion of self-awareness it allows. Below are some tips and insights that I have found helped me gain the most from my competition experiences:

You will never be 100% ready

If you wait until you are 100% ready before competing, then you will never compete. You can always be fitter, more technical or more composed. Feeling follows action - not the other way around. It is never as hard as it is the first time. You will be nervous, you will be scared and you will doubt yourself before your first competition. But I can promise you that you will grow more than you ever have during regular classes and lessons.

Allow for adequate rest beforehand

The last week to ten days of before a competition should see you tapering down the scale and frequency of your training. Physically, your muscles, tendons, joints and ligaments will appreciate the break and will be fresh for the contest. Your central nervous system will also benefit - too much competitive training in the final days before an event and you will find that your reactions will be slower than usual and your game will be stagnant. In athletics there is a saying:

“Do not leave your best performance on the practice track” -
the same can be said for grappling.

Don't make excuses beforehand

He who makes an excuse before a fight is going to need it. Don't be one of those guys who tells all his friends and teammates that he hasn't trained properly, is underweight or recovering from an injury. You are just trying to cover your bases should you lose. This is an unsporting and undignified practice. If you don't feel up to the standard of the event you are participating in but choose to compete anyway, then you must face the consequences.

Get to know the venue beforehand

Although this is not always possible, if you can try to inspect the venue the day before the competition. This will greatly diminish your nervousness on the day because it will be a place you have become familiar with as opposed to something foreign and intimidating.



10-time world champion roger Gracie - the ultimate competitor

Conserve your energy on the day

On the day of the event you should be aiming to expend as little energy as possible. Try to remain off your feet. Most of the time you should be sitting, or even better, lying down. Try to avoid viewing the matches prior to yours, unless you are watching your potential opponents and formulating your strategy. Watching your teammates compete and screaming advice to them is almost as draining as competing itself.

Regulate your breathing

Whether you notice it or not, the moment you enter the venue (and perhaps even before) your body begins its release of adrenaline (epinephrine). Although adrenaline has many benefits for the fighter one of the disadvantages is that it causes your breathing to become shallow. This robs your organs and tissues of much needed oxygen and hence leads to fatigue. By concentrating and ensuring your breathing is deep and rhythmic you not only negate this effect but also help still your mind and alleviate much of the pre-match anxiety.

Let go of the outcome

Do not be focused solely on winning, nor afraid to lose. These are both outcomes. All fighters, even the greats, lose at some point. There is just too much of a random element in grappling / BJJ competition to allow anyone to achieve a 100% win rate. Try instead, to focus on the process. If you learn something from your competition experience, then win or lose, you have gained. Some of my most important and enjoyable matches have been ones in which I have lost the fight, but gained valuable insight.

Be gracious in victory and defeat

Never, I repeat, never make excuses for a loss. I have been guilty of this in the past and I will never allow it to happen again. When asked about a match you lost always say “he beat me fair and square” regardless of whether or not you performed your best or you feel that the referee robbed you etc. By the same token, should you be fortunate enough to win, make sure you have the grace to acknowledge your opponent’s skill and heart.

Avoiding Common Injuries

I don't mean to scare you off, but injuries are prevalent in jiu jitsu. It's a tough sport and it's hard on the body. If you are training a lot, sooner or later it's likely that you will be injured. The good news is that you can greatly minimize the frequency and severity of injuries through intelligent training.

Warm up

As mentioned elsewhere in this book, a good warm-up is essential. Imagine you owned a highly tuned sports car. You wouldn't start it up and put your foot flat at the first traffic light because you'd wreck the engine. It's the same with your body. jiu jitsu is really demanding and to try and do it when your body is cold is inviting injury.

The colder the climate in which you live, and the older you are, the more comprehensive your warm up will need to be. Although it's technically your instructor's job to get you warm enough for the class, it's ultimately your responsibility to make sure your body is prepared. If this means arriving early before the class to do an additional warm-up, then so be it.

Strength Training

Although improved sports performance can be a benefit of strength training that is not its primary goal. First and foremost, strength training is used to prevent injury. Strong, healthy muscles and joints are far less likely to be damaged during the rigours of jiu jitsu. For more information on strength training, see the 'Supplemental Training' section of this book.

Tap Early, Tap Often

So many injuries are the result of guys having large egos and being too proud to tap when they are clearly caught in a submission. Being injured for six weeks because you were too much of a tough guy to tap is a far bigger blow to your ego than tapping out is, trust me.

Common Injuries and How to Avoid Them

- Knee

The knee is the largest joint in the human body, and one of the most easily injured. There are four major ligaments found around the knee joint, and of these the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) and the medial collateral ligament (MCL) are the most commonly injured. The ACL tends to be damaged when the joint changes direction rapidly, such as in a takedown attempt, and the MCL is usually injured by a direct blow to the outside of

the knee. The knee also contains cartilage, or meniscus, which acts as a shock absorber within the joint. Tears to the meniscus occur during twisting or excessive pivoting, which tends to occur in leg locks and takedown attempts and defence.

It is important to remember that the knee is a hinge joint, and as such it should not be twisted excessively. Be both aware and sensitive to your knees when you find legs are in an awkward or vulnerable position. Most knee injuries in jiu-jitsu occur through people trying to resist against their opponent's movements when their knee is in a compromised position, and the joint ultimately gives out.

Adding squatting movements to your training programme will strengthen the tendons, ligaments and muscles surrounding the knee and minimize your chance of injury.

- Fingers and Thumbs

Fingers and thumbs can be easily caught in a gi and hyper-extended. Fingers can easily become fractured or dislocated with this type of stress but there can also be subtle damage around the joint which can cause problems later. On the palmar aspect of the fingers lies the volar plate, a tough fibrocartilaginous structure that reinforces the finger joints. These are very easily injured in sports that involve gripping and if ignored can result in long term pain, deformity and poor range of movement. It is therefore important to seek medical advice if you have suffered a finger injury that is not settling down after a couple of days.

I learned early on that the way to avoid these injuries is to keep the fingers and thumbs of each hand together and slightly cupping the hand (i.e. forming a sort of a 'mitt'). whenever you are not gripping anything. When they are held like this it's far less likely that an individual digit will be bent backwards and damaged.



Keeping the hands cupped when not gripping prevents finger and thumb injuries

- Ribs

A 'popped' rib is probably the most common injury encountered in BJJ. It usually occurs when someone twists their torso too quickly and forcefully while trying to move their opponent's weight. Most of the time this is due to insufficient warm-up, but can also be the result of weak serratus, oblique, intercostal and abdominal muscles. Make sure your warm-up includes twisting and bending your torso in various directions until the tissues have become limber enough for the rigours of training.

- Lower Back

Most people, especially office workers and those who spend a lot of time driving, have very weak lower backs. Being in a sitting position for long periods causes the muscle of the lower back to become inflexible and weak. Addressing this weakness is not difficult however, and there are many exercises (including bridges, good-mornings, deadlifts etc) which will rapidly strengthen your back and make it strong enough for jiu jitsu.

NOTE: If you have injured your back it is important to seek medical advice. There are a wealth of different rehabilitation programmes and exercises that you can engage in to assist your recovery, such as the McKenzie method, which you can find out more about here:

<http://www.mckenziemdt.org>.

There was also a recent large meta-analysis performed which showed that Yoga is an effective way of recovering from lower back pain, and you can read about that study here:

<http://tinyurl.com/mslryrm>

If you have back pain it is also worth considering other options such as Active Release Technique (ART) and acupuncture, which is now recommended by the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) in the UK for the treatment of back pain.

Training in Brazil

Sooner or later, most BJJ practitioners toy with the idea of training in Brazil. It's a kind of pilgrimage that every jiu jitsu student should try to make at least once.

I've been to Brazil a couple of times and both were fantastic adventures, not only for the growth of my jiu jitsu, but also in terms of the cultural exposure. If you're undecided I would say take the risk - it's highly unlikely that you'll regret it.

Here are some tips to help you make the most out of your time there:

Where to train

All of the big teams usually have academies in the larger cities like Sao Paulo and Rio, but I found that academies where I felt the most authentic vibe were the little 'hole in the wall' gyms with tiny mat spaces and relatively unknown instructors. These, to me at least, embodied the essence of jiu jitsu.

Also, don't be surprised to find out that you're charged twice what locals are for classes. It's just the way it is.

If your instructor back home is Brazilian you should check with him to see if he minds you training at a different academy. 'Creontes' or traitors are severely frowned upon in Brazil.

On the mat

The guys in Brazil go hard. Especially if you're a gringo. Most of them equate losing to a foreigner with utter disgrace, so don't expect them to have any mercy on you and don't take it personally. Very few of them would ever even consider doing 'a light roll', so don't have any illusions about it.

The heat and humidity are also exceptional, especially in summer. I would strongly suggest you start training in a lightweight gi until you are accustomed to the conditions.

Also, you probably sweat a lot more than usual, so force yourself to drink much more than normal. I highly recommend coconut water - it's a very effective way to rehydrate as it contains additional minerals and antioxidants. It is relatively cheap and easily available in Brazil. Don't buy it in the stores, look for vendors selling it from small carts on the street. It's an excellent way of hydrating after training.



My brother and i meeting helio Gracie right after competing at the worlds in rio, 2006

Competing

If you decide to compete in Brazil, there are several options available, including the CBJJE's version of the world championships. Just be aware, that the referees are likely to have an inherent bias against gringos, so don't be surprised when decisions don't go your way.

Be Humble

Always remember that you are a guest in the country and try to be as humble and respectful as possible. Don't be like an american college student on spring break in Cancun.

Learning just a few key phrases in Portuguese will make you stand out from the average tourist. Although it's becoming a little more common, classes are seldom taught in english, so learning the Brazilian / Portuguese names for most of the jiu jitsu positions, movements and anatomy will go a long way.

Crime

Although I felt pretty safe most of the time, it's not uncommon for tourists to be robbed. Brazil is still a developing country and a lot of the people are very poor. Consequently tourists can be seen as easy targets for muggings etc. Try to keep a low profile and don't flash money and cameras around. If anything does happen, remember that jiu jitsu isn't knife / bullet-proof, no matter what anybody tells you.

There are companies which can help make the logistics of your trip a lot easier. I recommend Connection Rio - www.connectionrio.com

Overtraining

When I began to study grappling I had an obsession with the quantity of training I would do. My goal was always to do more training sessions and to train harder and longer in each session. If I didn't train twice a day I would feel guilty that I had wasted valuable mat time. Like many westerners, I suffer from the "more is better" mentality. We are all taught through various overt and subliminal sources that we constantly need to be doing more, achieving more and amassing more.

For me, one of the coolest things about jiu jitsu is that I can use it as a tool for my own personal evolution. It's enjoyable to watch yourself rewarded for your efforts on the mat with increased skill and ability. And anyone who tells you that you will be able to get the most out of the art without a large volume of training and effort is either ignorant or lying to you. But over the last several years I have radically changed my view on optimum quantity and frequency of training.

I now believe that often, less training is better than more. In my opinion, many BJJ practitioners are chronically over-trained. Overtraining in jiu jitsu causes your ability to plateau and eventually decline!

Remember that the training load is cumulative. This means that the stress that is placed on your system from working out is compounded over time. So if you train for too long without a proper break, you incur a sort of 'recovery debt'. This debt has to be paid sooner or later, or else your system will automatically take steps to protect itself. This is why many BJJ guys are injured all the time.



Overtraining in Jiu Jitsu is a predominant cause of injuries

Having any of these symptoms may indicate that you are overtrained:

1. Delayed reaction times

Research with Russian olympic athletes has shown that overtraining slows reflexes and reactions times. This is the first thing I notice when I am close to burnout.

2. Lack of Motivation to go to training

Sometimes this doesn't mean that you are lazy – mental fatigue is a tell-tale sign that you are spending too much time doing something.

3. You start gaining fat

You might be training 6 times a week but notice that your body is actually getting softer. This means your endocrine system has become imbalanced from overwork and that you probably have an excess of cortisol in your system.

4. Constant soreness and tiredness

If you are constantly dealing with niggling injuries, muscular pain, and general 'weariness', it's more likely than not that your body is struggling to cope with the stresses of your training schedule.

5. You get sick often

An increase in the frequency of flu and other illnesses may indicate that you are overtrained.

Don't be afraid to take time off from BJJ. Counter-intuitively, sometimes training less will improve your jiu jitsu. The human body and mind, and the organism as a whole, repair and grow during rest. Resting is as important as training. You will learn faster when you are fresh and as a result your training will be more efficient. Doing one class with an invigorated body and mind is better than doing three classes feeling lethargic and bored.

You will also perform better after a break. In an interview a few years back, Saulo Ribeiro, one of the greatest competitive BJJ fighters ever, said that he takes a full two weeks off before a major competition.

How to overcome it

As jiu jitsukas, we are martial artists, and every artist needs to step back from his canvas periodically. A few times per year I'll just switch off from BJJ completely for a week or two. By 'switch off' I mean put that aspect of my life on hold 'completely'.

This means no instructional videos or magazines, no hanging out at the academy, and no visualizing the techniques in my mind. It's difficult to do this with something that is such a big part of your identity, but it's worth it – when I return to the mat I find that I am sharper, fitter and more excited about the art than before.

PART 8

Further Resources

“Absorb what is useful, reject what is useless..” - Bruce Lee

Recommended Resources

When I began training in grappling, the internet was still relatively new and jiu jitsu was nowhere near as popular as it is today. As I was living in South Africa at the time, it was very difficult to get access to quality resources, so most of my jiu jitsu media consisted of vhs cassettes borrowed from friends.

These days it's completely different, and there is an ocean of high-quality BJJ and grappling material available, and most of it can be found online. These are some of the best ones I've seen:

Films and Documentaries

Choke

Documentary about Rickson Gracie and the Vale Tudo Japan Tournament in 1995. This is one of the most influential things I have come across in my jiu jitsu journey. It tells the story of one of the most self-actualized individuals on the planet and his mastery of his art.

<http://tinyurl.com/pdcoegc>

All The Good Things in Life Money Can't Buy

Short film chronicling the philosophies of Roberto 'Cyborg' Abreu and his victory at the 2013 ADCC Submission Grappling World Championships. Cyborg is one the best examples of an exceptionally skilled jiu jitsu fighter who maintains his humility and grace.

<http://tinyurl.com/q3ctr9a>

Day of the Zen

This documentary follows Mario Sperry, one of the founders of Brazilian Top Team, during an average day in his life. Although it's a little dated now, it gives a very good feel for the dedication professional jiu jitsu and MMA athletes go through. It also gives a glimpse into what it's like to train in Brazil if you're planning a trip out there.

<http://tinyurl.com/kdtqzhp>

The Spirit of Jiu Jitsu

Jiu Jitsu filmmaker Stuart Cooper and I collaborated on this project in Thailand in early 2013. In it I share some of my philosophies on life, jiu jitsu and yoga.

<http://tinyurl.com/n7rrbh4>

Training Videos / DVDs

BJJ Building Blocks

Designed exclusively for white belts, this is a year-long video course which features the fundamental moves every beginner should know, categorised according to the positional structure of jiu jitsu.

<http://tinyurl.com/o8c5qxr>

Blue Belt Requirements by Roy Dean

Roy Dean is a stand-out instructor and somebody with whom I share many of the same views on jiu jitsu. I highly recommend this DVD if you're looking for a detailed syllabus on the fundamental techniques.

<http://tinyurl.com/ka99f3z>

Beyond Technique

Unlike regular jiu jitsu instructional videos, Beyond Technique focuses on concepts and principles giving the viewer a versatile foundation with which to continue his bjj journey.

<http://tinyurl.com/o6938yj>

MGinaction

Marcelo Garcia is the most technically proficient grappler on the planet. His moves are the highest-percentage of any I've come across, and have greatly influenced my own style. This website offers monthly subscription to a constantly updated database of his instructional videos.

<http://tinyurl.com/n7g5wdk>

Websites

On the Mat

One of the original and still one of the best jiu jitsu lifestyle videos. These guys feature interviews with grappling athletes, training reports and articles as well as a bunch of cool info about training in Brazil.

www.onthemat.com

Slidey Foot

This blog is hosted by a former student of mine Can Sönmez, and features some of the most technical and detailed descriptions of techniques I've ever seen. Can also gives excellent reviews of training DVD's and gear. The ultimate BJJ fan-boy site.

<http://www.slideyfoot.com/>

Destroyer Submission Grappling

This is a cool and edgy BJJ and grappling 'aggregator' site. They put up the best of the latest technique and lifestyle videos floating on the web. They also have some cool gear.

<http://www.dstryrsg.com/>

Connection Rio

This company organises trips to Rio, Brazil which cater specifically to jiu jitsu guys. They deal with all the logistical aspects including tickets, accommodation and training venues.

www.connectionrio.com

Yoga for BJJ

An excellent resource for those wanting to start incorporating yoga into their training. It includes videos featuring tailor-made yoga sequences designed specifically for jiu jitsu. Highly Recommended.

<http://www.yogahytta.com/en/>

Digital Grappling

One of the most sophisticated BJJ learning resources on the market, Digital Grappling is a dynamic online tool designed to sharpen your grappling mind through an active, visual interface.

<http://tinyurl.com/kckyagn>

BJJ Finder

This is a comprehensive directory which allows you to easily locate jiu jitsu academies, seminars and tournaments across the globe.

<http://www.BJJfinder.com/>

Straight Blast Gym

This is the organisation of Jiu Jitsu black Matt Thornton, who has very progressive ideas on jiu jitsu, martial arts and personal growth in general.

<http://www.straightblastgym.com/>

Books & Magazines

Essential Brazilian Jiu Jitsu - Marc Walder

This is a great first book to purchase as the information is presented in an easily-readable and concise format and many of the fundamental techniques are explained clearly.

<http://tinyurl.com/npzgrjk>

Jiu Jitsu University - Saulo Ribeiro

One of the best Jiu Jitsu books available, it gives detailed insight into the mind-set, training methods and techniques of Saulo Ribeiro, one of the best teachers and competitors in the history of the art.

<http://tinyurl.com/nsm9qbt>

Drill to Win - Andre Galvao

If you want to be a competitor, there is no better book than this. Andre Galvao gives a detailed insights into a well-structured, year-long drilling program designed to get you ready for tournament jiu jitsu.

<http://tinyurl.com/ojq4tc2>

Jiu Jitsu Style Magazine

This is the most popular Jiu Jitsu Magazine in Europe, and for good reason.

<http://www.BJJstyle.com/>

Jits Magazine

This is an excellent BJJ lifestyle magazine which can be read online for free.

<http://jitsmagazine.com/magazine>

Jiu Jitsu Magazine

The biggest selling jiu jitsu print-publication in the USA, Jiu Jitsu Magazine continues to get better each month.

<http://jiujitsumag.com/>

Recommended Academies

Most jiu jitsu academies are well-run and operated by honest and qualified instructors, but as with everything else there are always a few individuals who spoil it for the rest of us.

Below I have listed academies that I have either trained or taught, or where I at least know the instructor, either personally or through the recommendation of somebody I trust. This doesn't mean that these are your only options, just the ones I vouch for personally.

These are also all academies where there is a friendly atmosphere and good spirit, which is just as important as the quality of instruction.

North America

United States

Renzo Gracie Academy (New York, NY)

Ybor City Jiu Jitsu Club (Tampa, FL)

Fat Buddha Fight Club (Rockport, ME)

Mountain Warrior Martial Arts

(Klamath Falls, OR)

10th Planet Jiu Jitsu (Los Angeles, CA)

10th Planet Jiu Jitsu San Francisco

(San Francisco, CA)

10th Planet Vista (Vista, CA)

50/50 (Arlington, VA)

Team Redzovic (Chicago, IL)

Combat Base (Redondo Beach, CA)

Canda

Gracie Barra Montreal

Open Mat MMA (Toronto)

Mexico

Renzo Gracie (Mexico City)

EXIT (Guadalajara)

Dominican Republic

Jiu Jitsu de la Costa (Cabarete)

Central America

Costa Rica

Athletic Advance (San Jose)

Panama

Sparta Jiu Jitsu (Panama City)

Serpente

South America

Brazil

De la Riva Academy (Rio de Janeiro)

Academia Fight Zone Copacabana
(Rio de Janeiro)

Gracie Barra (Rio de Janeiro)

Colombia

Gracie Barra Colombia (Medellin)

Argentina

Gracie Barra Cordoba

Gracie Buenos Aires

Europe

England

Jiu Jitsu Brotherhood Kingston
Roger Gracie Academy (London)
The Budokwai (London)
Mill Hill Jiu Jitsu (London)
The Tokon Academy (Hertfordshire)
Carlson Gracie London
Gracie Barra Birmingham

Wales

Roger Gracie Wales
Chris Rees Academy (Swansea)

Ireland

G1 MMA Training Centre (Drogheda)
Straight Blast Gym Ireland (Dublin)

Scotland

Cross Combat (Edinburgh)

Estonia

Voimla (Tartu)

France

Urban Team (Paris)
PS Phoenix BJJ (Paris)
Tropa De Elite (Cannes)

Iceland

Mjöltnir (Reykjavik)

Spain

Costa Del Sol Fight & Fitness (Malaga)

Moldova

BJJ Athletic (Chisinau)

Germany

Arena (Aschaffenburg)
Daniel Ackermann Jiu Jitsu (Mainz)
Fight Bros (Freiburg)

Switzerland

Frota BJJ (Zurich)
Carlson Gracie (Zurich)
BJJ Staufen (Canton Aargau)

Austria

Gracie Barra Vienna

Greece

Cross Gym (Athens)
Gracie Barra Athens

Poland

Złomiarz Team (Gdańsk)
Lutadores Opole
Gracie Barra Draculinho (Poznan)
Copacabana Fight Club (Warsaw)

Italy

Legionarius Arena (Rome)

Scandinavia

Sweden

Yamasaki Academy (Gothenburg)
Allstars (Stockholm)

Denmark

Combat Sports Academy (Copenhagen)
Arte Suave (Copenhagen)

Norway

Frontline Academy (Oslo)

Finland

Combat Society (Helsinki)
TJJK (Tampere)

Asia

India

Institute of Jiu Jitsu (Bangalore)

Thailand

Q23 (Bangkok)

Bangkok BJJ (Bangkok)

Tiger Muay Thai (Phuket)

Team Quest (Chiang Mai)

Hong Kong

Versus Performance

Epic MMA

Taiwan

Taipei BJJ

Japan

Axis (Tokyo)

AACC (Tokyo)

Paraestra (Tokyo)

Philippines

ATOS/VPF (Manila)

Singapore

Evolve

School of Submissions

Australasia

Australia

VT-1 Gym (Sydney)

Graham Warea Jiu Jitsu (Newcastle)

Stacey Wilson (Perth)

Perkins Jiu Jitsu (Melbourne)

New Zealand

GSW Martial Arts (Wellington)

Gracie Barra Auckland

NZ Fight and Fitness Academy (Dunedin)

Allegiance BJJ (Hastings)

Middle East

Kuwait Combat Athletics
Abu Dhabi Combat Club
Team Nogueira Dubai
Gracie Barra Kuwait

Africa

South Africa

Renzo Gracie Cape Town
Chris Bright MMA (Port Elizabeth)
Quantum Tribe (Johannesburg)

Angola

Gracie Barra Angola (Luanda)

Frequently Asked Questions

During my career as a Brazilian Jiu Jitsu / Grappling Instructor and the time I have been running the Jiu Jitsu Brotherhood, these are the most common questions I have been asked by students and readers.

Q: How long will it take to achieve the black belt?

A: It's different for everyone and depends on many factors including your frequency of training, athletic background, concentration and consistency, but a general guideline is 7-10 years.

Q: My friend John always makes me tap, how do I beat him?

A: There may or may not be a technique or concept that could help you beat your friend but asking these types of questions indicates that you are not yet aware that jiu jitsu is not about winning or losing, but instead about self-awareness and growth. Instead of trying to beat your friend, perhaps you should try to focus on your own breathing, composure and learning.

Q: What's the difference between Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and regular Ju Jitsu?

A: Brazilian Jiu Jitsu is a modified form of the original Japanese art. It focuses more heavily on ground-fighting and sparring.

Q: How do I pass the guard?

A: It's very difficult to answer such generalized questions. If you are having problems with certain moves or positions it's important to be as specific as possible when asking your instructor for help. Find the point or movement where you get stuck or the actual aspect that's causing you difficulty. For example, asking "How do I prevent my opponent from catching one of my legs in the half guard?" is a much better question than "How do I hold the side mount?".

Q: Am I too old to start training?

A: More than likely not. I have seen 80 year old men doing jiu jitsu for the first time in their lives. Helio Gracie, one of the founders of the art, was still on the mats well into his late 80's and early 90's.

Most of the time, age becomes an issue only if you let it. Obviously you will not be as agile and explosive as the youngsters in your gym, but remember, at the end of the day

the only person you're competing against is yourself.

I've written an in-depth article about training after the age of 30 which you can read here:

<http://tinyurl.com/n5ecdxy>

Q: Do you take supplements?

A: I take a lot! If you want to know more about which particular ones I use, read this detailed article:

<http://tinyurl.com/d2dj52z>

Remember that supplements aren't a magic-bullet that will solve all your health issues and make you invincible on the mat. At best they are an effective addition to a good diet and clean lifestyle.

Q: What's the best conditioning for Jiu-Jitsu?

A: There is no 'best'. Each different type of conditioning offers its own benefits and drawbacks. The most important thing to do is try as many different types as possible and listen to your body - it will tell you what is affecting it positively / negatively.

Q: How many times per week should I train?

A: This is a tough question to answer because everybody is different and each of us have different thresholds and capacities. I usually give the following advice:

- Train as much as is fun. If you can do 2-4 jiu jitsu sessions per week and 2 conditioning sessions per week you will make great progress. Training once per week is not effective – you will forget between lessons and be unable to consolidate your learning.
- Listen to your body. You will feel when it's tired and needs rest. But be honest with yourself. Make sure you differentiate between feeling a little lazy and the honest, bone-tiredness that comes from lots of tough training.
- Remember too that consistency is the most important part of training. It's better to train twice per week for 5 years than to do 7 sessions a week for a 3 months, get burned out and/or injured and then not train for a year.

Feel free to email me at nic@jiujitsubrotherhood.com if you have anything else you'd like to ask.

Closing Thoughts

“There is no guru now, there is no one to be followed. There is no leader, there is no guide. You are alone; you are the aloneness.” - Osho

I feel that the title of this book may have been somewhat misleading. Although I'm sure that diligent application of the principles, techniques and strategies within will undoubtedly get you to the black belt faster, that is not the primary intention of the text.

A few years ago I noticed that the belts, techniques and competition results started to become less and less important.

It became clear to me that jiu jitsu is a 'spiritual trip' - a journey of self-discovery. It takes you to the very limits of your physical and mental capacities and constantly teaches you how to find your way through the world with more efficiency and composure. And most importantly, it helps you connect with your fellow human beings and find new 'brothers' that you never knew you had.

It is my hope that the readers of this book will become a different breed of martial artists. People who understand that they are their own best teachers. Aware and open individuals who are always seeking, learning and growing.

Don't take anything I say as the absolute truth. Test it for yourself.

Enjoy your journey!

Nicolas Gregoriades

About the Author



Nicolas Gregoriades is a martial artist and spiritual explorer from Cape Town, South Africa.

In 2003 he moved to London to earn his black belt in jiu jitsu. There he founded the popular martial arts community, The Jiu Jitsu Brotherhood and became the first person to be awarded the black belt by the legendary Roger Gracie.

He is also the co-host of the bi-monthly podcast The Journey which discusses a broad range of topics related to life in the modern world.

In late 2012 he took a trip to the amazon to drink the sacred plant medicine, Ayahuasca, which profoundly affected his world view and caused him to drastically change his life path.

He now travels the world teaching jiu jitsu, studying yoga and learning about the human experience.

You can share in his discoveries here:

www.thejourneypodcast.com

www.jiujitsubrotherhood.com

About the Jiu Jitsu Brotherhood

The idea for the Jiu Jitsu Brotherhood came to me several years ago during an intense sparring session with one of my instructors. The experience was so powerful and transformative that it made me realise that jiu jitsu is far more than a body of knowledge and an art form - it's a way of connecting people.

The organisation was developed with the following tenets in mind:

Community

Although competition is a healthy and important aspect of the martial arts, it can create a sentiment of 'my team versus your team'. The Jiu Jitsu Brotherhood is a movement designed to foster unity within the community of jiu jitsu practitioners and martial artists.

Self-Reflexivity

During his journey, the martial artist must face all aspects of himself. Our Logo is designed to express this, which is why we chose the image of a serpent devouring its own tail, the ouroboros. It represents self-reflexivity and the constant process of renewal, two things which are inextricably entwined with the practise of jiu jitsu.



The Ouroboros represents constant self-reflection and growth

Open-Mindedness

The Jiu Jitsu Brotherhood also represents a holistic approach to the study of the art. By remaining mentally flexible and having the courage to try different approaches, we constantly improve and refine our training methods.

Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank the following individuals for helping make this book possible:

Steve Finan - Without you I'd never have made it to black belt.

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Roger Gracie - Who taught me the meaning of the word 'technical'.

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Jonathan Shotter - For his detailed and thorough editing.

Johnny Jen, Anton Kraly & Kurt Mäkelä - You guys showed me that the dream could be achieved.

Bill Thomas - This project would not have been possible without your patient and expert assistance.

To all my teachers and students across the globe. Thank you for supporting me on this journey.

I can't believe how much longer I can train, and I really love the added focus.
Nic Gregoriades, founder of the Jiu-Jitsu Brotherhood



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